

***THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SPOONS***

**A Dramatic Poem**

**and**

***THE FUGITIVE ARCHIVE***

**The Creative Writer in the Archive**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of *The Disappearance of Spoons*, a collection of linked dramatic poems, and *The Fugitive Archive*, a critical analysis of how a creative writer encounters and investigates significant silences in the local archive. *The Disappearance of Spoons* explores the experiences of four characters stranded during a national rail strike at Newcastle Central Station in January 1919. The disappearance of a canteen of spoons is at the heart of the work, its title being taken from an observation made at the time by Arthur Ransome in his Russian journals. The characters encounter each other's differences, attempting, but failing to negotiate the others' conflicting objectives. Their interactions and intertwining stories concern sacrifice and surrender, the possibilities of revolution, and the liberation of war. The central character Molly and her unspoken heretical dissent forms the hinge of the action. With a mixture of idiomatic and formal expression the characters' inner worlds and the selves they present to themselves and each other begin to unravel. Although historical research forms some of the creative content, I found that an alternate and more complex iteration of the contribution of women to the cultural and industrial character of Tyneside is often suppressed within local archival expressions. Working-class women's experiences are not prioritised and often misrepresented in the archive despite previous evidence to the contrary. The silent and inexpressible can find a home in a poetic form, however, and the creative work reflects a fractured and incomplete witness to the forgotten fragments of evidence residing in the further corners of the archive. The critical thesis examines my research experience as a creative writer pursuing a voice for the unvoiced and overlooked in the local archive, in which the disappearance of spoons serves as a facilitating metaphor for archival absence.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my mother who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease last year.

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*The  
Disappearance  
of  
Spoons*

***Sukhanov asked me if I had noticed the disappearance of all spoons...***

***Arthur Ransome Russia in 1919***

***In the Picture-House***

Fugitive from your narrow bed  
Subject to tiny printed fears  
Cited and bound  
In parliamentary sheets

Abstract in your head  
Monochrome Tzarinas  
Parading newsreel streets  
Corseting ricochets and dreamy Chevrolets

Bronchial buckos show  
A clamorous world  
You barely know

Extracting shillings  
From horse-hair seats  
Avoiding calls to insurrection

You go  
To sink  
Yourself  
Beneath  
The moody bitch of river

### ***Straw slippers***

Hemmed into a greatcoat  
With the treasures her mother gives her  
Tamara swaps fine gowns for firewood  
Maples' wardrobe chopped to bites for the hungry stove  
Dancing-shoes bartered  
For corners of bread

The family's anxious teeth  
Leer and buckle  
Unhinged in doorways

Tamara chucks old army boots a full salon's length  
Favouring a pair of straw slippers  
Stitched in green and gold  
Found beneath a maid's abandoned bed

### ***The Great Silence***

Deaf to Tommy's last gift  
Yelping in the night  
Mothers, daughters, sisters, wives  
Button-up and shut-down  
Not standing there bawling  
For all the world to see

***Neva***

Tamara cracks open the city freighted with jewels  
The depressed family dog loping at her side

Now that all the fancier shops are shut  
Between snow and haematite window pane  
She slides light in raffia shoes

To Hermitage  
To column to marble  
To stilled stock exchange  
The iced garden monuments  
The semi-fredo river

Gunshots hymn and counter-point  
A masquerade of old church bells

The dog spooks  
Leaps the parapet  
A slow swallowing gulp  
Creaking  
Creased  
Forgetful  
Ice

A spotty revolutionary sees it all  
and  
demands a kiss

Tamara breathes in  
Pressed metal breath  
Dreams of the movies

## ***Glue Street***

Molly rewinds the year in her head  
When his mother came calling:

*Mind this house is a tip*

*No time for housework Ma  
There's a war on  
I've to mill me interrupted screw  
All the parts for me Howitzer  
Firing pins and gun sight  
Screw the cone and fit it  
To the breech block*

*I've to set from me drawings  
Grind me tools  
Design me repairs*

*With logarithm and slide rule  
Calculate me factor of safety*

*There's hand-lapping the bores of guns  
Cleaning the rifling grooves  
Making casts in gutta-percha*

*I got learned  
In one day  
Setting up  
On a twelve-and-a-half-inch lathe  
Dividing on change wheels  
Cutting the internal thread*

*Hoisting a six-pound tank gun  
To fly through the works  
A fifty-ton thirteen inch  
Naval Armstrong*

*Sounds dirty to me*



*Aye it does  
What with the grinds  
The hand-lapping  
The screws and the bores  
Nee wonder the men came home  
Raring to go*

*Mind it's no walk in the park  
There's rats in the toilets  
As big as your feet  
Nee lights  
Short breaks  
Twenty-three hour shifts*

*Touched up on the tram  
By them  
what pleaded at tribunals  
They were doing better for the war-effort  
By staying at hyem*

*We got learned in twelve weeks  
What took them three year*

*So no Ma  
I'm not sticking me hand  
Down the nettie  
To wipe off his crap  
The cockroaches can kiss my arse  
Make a nest in his bed*

*I'll fly down Rye Hill and follow the river  
I'll chop off me hair  
Get passage to anywhere*

*Ma sucked her teeth*

*If y'd have had bairns  
It would have been different*

*No answer for that*

## ***Vacated***

Alfred is a railway-carriage washer  
Not what he's used to and a filthy job  
But some bugger's got to do it

Hoping one day  
To work  
His way back up  
Still a canny screw  
For a thirty-eight-bob hero

WHAT    GOT    STOPPED

A woman had it before  
She can go home and mind her babies

Between the cheeks of prickling cushions  
Alfred finds vacant tabloids  
Ditched by commuters on electric trains  
Pockets pennies  
Occasional sovereigns

## ***Shit-hole***

To the west of the town a young man constructs  
A speech of Futuristic proportions:

*The labouring-classes tear to pieces Friday nights  
In public bars and tubercular picture-houses  
With no inheritance to pass on  
No gold-standard to mine  
They can speak as they find  
And hang the consequences*

*Have you been to Benwell lately lads and lasses?  
It's a shit-hole  
Faces grey as funeral meats  
Gimcrack trinkets kept for best  
Handed-me-down to finance  
Mules and mortgages*

*Credit is their currency  
Gee-gaws their primogeniture  
Knocked-up knocked-off flim-flam  
Jerry-built paper-thin houses  
Staked to the family name  
To have a name  
To be a name  
To be a something round here*

*Fuck-off to your revolutions you say  
He's a Kraut on a hiding to nothing  
What does he know  
Of our bust and boom?  
Drink now  
Fight  
And be merry  
We've earned tomorrow's gloom*

**WOMEN GO HOME!**

**You who are fitted for windows**

**Your precious womanliness will wither**

**Without the cushion of hearth and home**

**WOMEN GO HOME**

## ***The Windows***

Molly peels scraps of *Newcastle Daily Journal*  
From the mean-eyed windows

In hinged malevolence a well-worn velveteen box squats  
On the fold-down table

Molly squeaks a glug of vinegar  
To water hot from a pot on the range  
and drowns a rag of bed-sheet  
Her hands swelling protest red

The refusenik windows  
See-through her muttered threats  
To smash them  
Just that  
And nothing more

Besieged by algorithms  
She rearranges smears  
In redundant functions  
Efforts oppositional to results

Framed in the hacky window  
Paused in bricks and mortar  
Sprouting Gallant Soldier

Who's the old woman with the lanky hair?  
Me she thinks and fetches a chair

### ***Ticker Tape***

In Benwell  
Known to his mother  
As Wilhelm  
Willie ales-up  
Cheap Sowerby glasses

Father and his friends trade  
Ticker tape talk

The guns are hidden  
A ship is coming

Exchange for money  
The guns despatch

The tide will turn  
Their turn will come  
Their turn turned 'round

They turn and turn and toast a cheer

The boy knows this is nonsense  
It's jam tomorrow never jam today

### ***A Kronberg Lunch***

Horizontal in the dining-room port-hole  
Seagulls boss and buffet for the scraps  
Tossed to the iron air

Tamara's stomach churns hunger  
A silly sound like a lost dog  
Barking nautical miles away

The officer with half a face  
Beckons to her  
To take the adjacent space

Making her laugh  
It isn't funny

The soldier taps out a code  
With the toe of his sound boot  
Tamara's undefended ankles regret  
Fashion and hide beneath her coat

The one good grey eye regards  
Tamara pretending to be captured  
By a constellation of rust-spots  
Devouring the wallpaper to the left of his head

Tamara's awkward toes  
Stretch her slippers  
A systematic check of her hem

He suggests American coffee in his cabin  
She demurs  
A Turkish cigarette on deck

The narrow corridor is all pitch and thrum  
Closing them closer in the guts of the ship  
Her shoulder brushes the sleeve of his greatcoat  
She tries not to clank as they march along

Blown against him to allow  
A whistle of sailors to pass  
A scramble of feather and lung  
Thursday sawdust swept  
From Maltetsky market

Tamara considers fainting  
She considers running away

She considers his disintegrating skin  
The good grey eye

She coughs folding into her cabin



### ***Executor of the Useless***

Has Alfred seen the billboards?  
Heard the fiery chat?  
Compositors and printers' assistants  
Rallying to the cause  
Of  
A  
National  
Railway  
Strike

Miners and transport officials  
Restrained from impetuous action

Could go well for Alfred  
Responsibility  
Preferment  
Favour

Soldiers will be stationed  
Not the running of locomotives  
That mistake  
Will not be made again  
Safe as houses  
Safe and sound  
Safe

Portering for the night  
The last trains  
In and out of the city

Alfred  
Chief Executive of the Useless  
Thrills at the invitation to sup  
With the pin-striped Imperators  
A brief shame pats a twitch upon his eye

Give us your answer  
Old chap  
Plenty would  
Alfred blushes a hearty yes

## ***Benwell***

Running Benwell our boy Willie  
Errands for his breath-robbed mother  
She who keeps very still  
and speaks very quiet  
Hoping the barricaded doors stay closed  
Until a dissembled dawn  
Sends the conspirators home

Crumbling an edge of bread  
Willie and his Blakey's Segs  
Kick shit out of the road  
For his mother's burden

***Gibson Street***

January seeps into Alfred's skin  
And the leather of his boot  
Parts company with his sole

By the Gibson Street wash-house  
Women queue with their bundles  
Alfred sorry closes his peepers

*Burrowed into mud*  
*Slow to worm*  
*I do not know where*  
*This I ends*  
*This silence that will not stop*

## ***Hat***

Trailing the shops Molly  
Lingers by Fenwick's window display

A matinee hat she will never buy  
Seeded with pearls  
The size of babies' teeth  
Not ever  
Not even on the never-never

Pock-marked mannequin shoulders undulate in furs  
Awoken to a half-life by the pounds  
Shillings and pence secured  
In the manicured hands  
Of the independent ladies  
Of South Gosforth

Horizontal snow stumbles her  
Into the Drawing Room Café  
where lady doctors take tea  
and propertied school-mistresses sip  
Nancy Astor's campaigning in Plymouth  
What progress we make

Adjusting chiffon scarves  
Squaring a new-fangled cloche  
Cashmere gloves  
Order the waitress about

Molly shy of the price of a cuppa  
Pats her imaginary headgear  
And dives out again  
Pursued by Coty scent

**THE KEEL: THE ORGAN OF SOCIALISM ON TYNESIDE  
HANDS OFF RUSSIA! WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!  
NATIONAL STRIKE! SUPPORT THE RAILWAY WORKERS!**

## ***Mauser***

In his attic cell Willie  
Listening to his mother's  
Howk and hawk  
Twists paper into the grate  
An abrupt thump  
On the clapped-out table below  
Father reaches his peroration

Sharing with Willie pro tem  
and spark out on the covers  
An exile of Munich  
A crepuscular pamphleteer  
A proselytiser in the forty-four pubs  
Of the Scotswood Road

Rallying Armstrong's  
Working-class Tories  
Who would rather sing *Bellona*  
Send us more contracts

Unconducted by mother's  
familiar creaking lung her coughs  
howls and spits  
The dissonant orchestra stops

From the pocket in Comrade Spy's  
greatcoat pokes a gun-stock  
Polished by transactions in snugs  
Thumbed by the stable and the book-maker's stall

Willie excavates through spent broadsides  
The pistol from the deep pocket  
Sir Radical moans but does not wake

***Rocked in the Kronberg***

*Nothing*

*Nothing*

*But*

*Head-counting twenty-four*

*Pairs of kid-gloves*

*Ranked in order of age*

*Robbed from a rosewood drawer*

*Hung on railings to sweat*

*In the late October sun*

*The horizon a black smudge*

*Therefore*

*Nothing*

*Nothing*

*Meanwhile*

*Acres of paper snow*

## ***Spoons***

Alfred's favourite job:  
Polishing his Mother's silver spoons  
Enumerating for Molly  
The benefits of a broken strike:

ALFRED

Regular visits to the kinos,  
Electric light for dark places  
Only the cockroaches know  
Having a shit indoors  
Labour-saving devices  
Chenille under-cloth  
To cushion these Saxony *Silberlofel*  
All that's left  
Of Mother's bequest

They'll be displayed  
Accompanied and partnered by  
Machine-stitched boots  
A coat for best  
No longer greasy from  
Weekly holidays in hock  
Maybe a hat for a Sunday Molly?

Molly counts Sundays in her head  
Each one accompanied by a fading frizzle

ALFRED

Mr Pattinson will expect me smart  
So I'll need the good suit out

He insinuates a quick tumble for his pains  
And reaches out across the table  
Molly turns stony  
He thumps her uneasy arm



ALFRED

I've had enough of a woman

What shuts up shop

Refusing her husband

A worse ball-breaker

Than the bloody Hun

He starts on her

with neither

Ceremony nor success

Molly absents herself

## ***Gin and It***

*Down the pub on Saturday  
One day off  
Make it count  
A whole weekend in one day  
No mooning around  
There's a war on*

*Forty-four pubs on the Scotswood Road  
Up to The Hydraulic Crane  
All fancy tiles and chased glass*

*Funny how the pubs round here  
Are grander than the houses  
Which are hovels in case you're asking*

*Couple of old bodies don't budge  
Pair of spotty lads scarper*

*That young bit from Birmingham  
All blonde and curly  
Makes a moue for their departure*

*Hats on  
Plonk down  
Petticoats peeping  
No stays though  
They're off for good*

*Nice coat on  
With the nipped in waist  
A lass down Shields  
Acquired this material  
Her and a couple of mates  
Knocking out fifty costumes a week  
Gadgie foreman's never noticed  
With his Pigeon Lung  
And his eye on their arses  
"On y'gan lasses"  
He twinkles  
Eager for an eyeful  
Of their hint ends*

*Lined up on the brass  
There's Stouts, and Ports and Lemons  
Black-pudding and tickled onions*

*Ada asks for a Gin and It  
Read about in 'The Illustrated'*

*Barman says: "Gin and It?  
What the frig's 'It'? "*

*Wife pipes up from the snug  
"Sweet Vermouth and Angostura's Bitters,  
Y'arse."*

*It goes a bit quiet  
Ada looks at him  
He looks at Ada  
"It's me feet" says he*

*Spotting a paying crowd though  
His Mrs brings the bottles through*

*Neat gin poured  
Into an unsuitable glass  
Half again Martini  
and a drop of the bitters*

*Ada raises the glass to her lips  
The 'It' blushing pink  
She salutes the barman with her eyes  
Knocks it back  
We cheer*

*Ada orders another  
So do I  
So does the one from Birmingham  
By three that afternoon  
Gaffer's got his boots off  
Weeping into his fallen arches*

*I'm up on the bar  
Kicking me height  
Jigging to 'Elsie Marley'.*

***Black Arm Band***

Willie at her open bedroom door  
Takes not one step towards her

Dare not touch her  
As Death subsumes her

His father climbs the hollow stair  
Ties the cheap crape substitute  
with infinite care

Willie takes the gun  
and runs

Down Hampstead Road  
Crosses Barnsbury, down Elm Street  
Past St John's Cemetery  
Down Gluehouse Lane  
Aline Street and onto Scotswood Road  
Past Paradise, and the urinals outside Hodgkin Park  
All the way to the Hydraulic Crane

## *Émigré*

To avoid the ruined soldier  
Tamara sleeps away the day  
By night she haunts the gangway

Families huddled around heirlooms  
Passing Box Brownie photographs  
Of dachas and factories  
Engineering works and abandoned armoires

Economic émigrés, these diplomatic  
Secretaries, these pillars of empire,  
Dowager aunts, these teachers, shipbuilders,  
Salesmen and publishing grandees,  
Financial ambassadors hauling carts of Vologda

These drowned on river banks  
Shot across snow-tight borders  
Haggling for visas

## ***Hydraulic Crane***

Alfred on his back  
Mouth dropped open  
Off the latch  
Snoring

Sick with his *Daily Mail* promises  
Molly in her thin overcoat  
Holds the heirloom-spoons

She steps onto the street  
Is scooped up  
By a prevailing wind

Willie shedding leaflets  
Like torn eczematous skin  
Frayed dark slash knotted  
To his arm  
Bools past her  
Knocks her jack-like  
Into the snug  
He does not look back  
She does not expect an apology

In the fuggy little backroom  
Of the local pub  
Women girded by war  
Have acquired the habit of play

No talk of bairns  
Black-leading  
White-stoning  
Pleats or  
Pleading  
But Our Bella and football  
Britches and ballistics  
Jokes about  
The inadequacies of cocks

Freedoms lined up  
Where cribbage and dominoes  
Once held sway  
and will again

When the lasses  
Get cracked back  
To the kitchen

Have a drink Molly dear  
Gin and It?  
Knock it back

Plan a Peace Tea  
Bloody Great War  
Great Sacrifice  
Glorious Dead

Three drinks down  
Molly's silent heresy beads her brow  
In the rinsed-out dying day  
She counts the spoons and egg-shells her way

## ***Shields***

An army boot  
Bobs over the wreck  
Of HMS Nottingham  
Takes in water  
Past *Devil's Hole*  
*Fern Deeps*  
*North East Bank*  
*Graveyard*

Sucked down the coast

Into *Outer Silver Pit*  
Sunk on the tide at *Port of Tyne*

Home to the *Votadini*  
'The Angry Ones'  
'Those Furious Bastards'

Though not so furious now  
The Saved mass on the quayside  
Hawking tobacco, lodgings and snide liquor

Tamara streams to the electric train  
Weaving through the scuttling shifters

Baby-faced killers with thirty-yard stares  
Pitch tab-ends into the bilious river

Muffled against the Spanish and the snow  
Fast-talking Spring-heeled Jills and Jacks  
Swirl chatter at their targets

Penny for this, shilling for that  
Selling their granny 'till  
She hasn't a tooth in her head



### ***Taylor's Pawnshop***

An expectant Friday crowd devoted  
To making do and mending  
Brews at the pawn-broker's door

Most of the women are glued  
To the good suit waving  
From the frowsty window  
Some of their denser menfolk  
Never catch on  
To their clobber's  
Days away

Full of wind and piss  
Eager for temporary ownership  
Of their vagrant bits and pieces  
Everybody knows  
Everybody's business

Another one gone  
That German one  
With the lad and his Dad  
And the leaflets  
Up Benwell  
Bad business  
That's Benwell

Busting to settle scores  
Pay off tick  
Sink a skin-full  
Darn a bit of peace  
Into a rickety elbow

At the end of the queue Molly sneezes  
Their holiday mood recoils, re-groups  
Molly backs away  
Cradling the relieved spoons

***Religion is the sigh of the Oppressed creature. The heart of a heartless world And the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.***

***Karl Marx A Contribution to the Critique of  
Hegel's Philosophy of Right***

## ***Creatures***

On Grainger Street mantels  
Murmurations settle  
Splattering  
Cornice and column  
And sighing horses  
Pulled-up outside  
Central Station  
St Nicholas Cathedral bells

In smart vestibules  
Lit by the glow of a snout  
Hunkered in tiled arches  
Sacks of our Brave Lads

In a mourned lock-up  
Willie targets starlings  
Their button eyes on sooty ledges  
Waiting out the hour

***Strike Empty***

A whistle hoots  
A shout goes up  
Everybody out!

Alfred waves off  
The last London train

Stokes up the stove  
In Lost Property

Delineated by coal dust  
The empty shapes of what  
Once was shelved there  
In silence  
Scissors anchored by a chain

He remembers the beautiful  
Mouth gargling mud  
"Shoot me, shoot me now."

### ***Platform Four***

Tamara steps down from  
The last suburban train  
The station holding  
Steaming breath

A distant calliope shunts  
The engine to the yard  
The pincer cold  
Scalps and bristles  
Chills her armpits  
Clears her throat

Solid seam basilica rock  
One light shines  
A man lifts his hand to his mouth and she begins to walk

### ***Moody Bitch***

In a compartment of the High-Level Bridge  
Cross-hatched by a gibbous moon  
Picks out Molly from the stinkers

*The head is the heaviest  
Lean out and follow  
How easy to let go*

From the sickly river toots  
A red-funnelled tug  
A man very much like her Alfred  
Waves a smoky reveille

Molly misses her step  
The night falls back on the city  
Theatres bolt their doors  
And wave goodbye to business

Trudging for a tram  
Molly right turns to the station

*Sigh*

A knock on the glass  
Her cold knuckles poised  
Alfred surfaces

ALFRED  
Closed. Whole place is closed.

TAMARA  
London train? I require the London train.

ALFRED  
Nothing going out, nothing coming in...

He adds for authority's sake

ALFRED  
Miss.

Silence  
She knocks again

TAMARA  
It's cold out here.

Something in the voice  
The shape in the window  
A crab of fascination scuttles  
Over the shoulders of Alfred's  
Shiny new responsibilities  
He opens the door

***Killingworth Billy***

Trying to remember the measurements  
And what they were for  
Strands of calculus unravelling  
Unremarkable Molly  
Slips unnoticed

Head down  
Down at heel  
Shabby shredded  
Slit edges  
Hides in Killingworth Billy  
Her convex face in the back of a spoon



***Thermae***

The heat from the office fire  
Wraps around her ankles  
Slumped in the upholstered chair  
Her sodden slippers hum in coaly air

Alfred inhales her damp tang  
A sleek dirty ship rat  
He murmurs striking trains  
and twenty-four hours  
She raises her hand

TAMARA  
*Pjalster.*

ALFRED  
What?

TAMARA  
Please.

ALFRED  
Yes?

TAMARA  
Some hot water?

ALFRED  
Yes

Unbuttoning Alfred  
Patrician élan born of youth  
Breeding and ignorance  
Synthesised by galvanic insurgency

Backing off to the back-room Ascot  
With its volcanic magic  
Alfred is the Roman in the bath-house  
A private man of private means

***Not a chain was broken by the swelling of spirit and will, but a lock merely rusted through. The chain fell off and the freed stood amazed, helpless, embarrassed and needed to arm against their will. The ones sensing their advantage were the quickest***

***Walter Rathenau***

## ***Sleeper***

Following the last train in  
Willie counts out  
The rusted sleepers

Hops the platform  
The murmur of voices  
In the waiting room

***Only a foot***

TAMARA  
Turn your back

ALFRED  
Why?

Shrugging off the weighted coat  
She reaches for the edge of her gown  
Flustered Alfred turns away  
The station-clock  
Tick  
Tocks  
Tick  
Tocks  
Her feet glide  
Into water  
A sly glance  
The abandon of a child  
Unmarked by chores  
An imprint of entitlement  
A jigger of *Nový Svět*  
Laid in a limed cellar

He gathers in the beached cloth  
A shiver of soap  
Sinks to his knees  
His hand  
To her drowned foot  
She could stop him  
This old man  
She could  
Stop him

It is only a foot

**Mr Pattinson**

A rat-a tat-tat  
Alfred is far away  
It comes again  
Crump-hole panic rises in his throat  
He gets ahead of himself in his head

*It's Mr Pattinson, it's Mr Pattinson*  
*Coming to check how good I'm doing*  
*What'll I say?*  
*She's me wife*  
*No*  
*Me daughter?*  
*No*  
*A friend of the family*  
*Me fiancée*  
*A vagrant*  
*A woman of the night*  
*A common prostitute that will not shift*  
*He'll understand*  
*No he won't*  
*He's a Newcastle Presbyterian*

*I'll tell her to hide*  
*He'll hear my voice*  
*He'll know a rabbit's off*

He opens the door  
It's Molly tight  
In the frame  
In wild spirituous  
Unsteady light

***Die Stunde der Abrechnung naht***

Pressed to the wall of the ticking station  
Slight and silent the boy  
With no plan but change  
Watches three shadows play  
In the etched glass of Lost Property

Complicity so loud  
He could fire the gun  
Crack the enslaved marble floors  
Dobson's portico lunettes and pavilions  
Burmantoft's faience

He propels, he runs, he hurls himself at the door  
The hour of reckoning is come

## *Useful Idiots*

A soap bubble trembles  
And collapses with a clunk  
In the draft from the door  
In which Willie has his foot  
In a moment he is in  
Turns the key in the lock  
Does not start shooting  
Elects to  
Speechify an address  
Rehearsed to bits  
Until his notes fell  
Exhausted  
To his mother's linoleum floor:

WILLIE  
Comrades.  
Comrades.  
Comrades.

Are our dead any different from theirs?  
Dry in the wind and scattered  
To the trees

We're all buried by the parish now  
That parish of war beyond the Channel  
Comrades, death is democracy

Graveyards and mausoleums  
Hold strong and ricketed bone

My friends the destitute love their children more  
The only capital they hold  
In revolution and war

The aristos put their children to wet-nurses  
Preparatory private schools  
Church, army, state  
That your bourgeoisie ape

Comrades are on their way  
A thousand at my back  
The army is with us  
Frigates and battleships massed  
At the harbours of Hartlepool, Seaham  
Amble and North Shields

ALFRED  
Listen, son...

WILLIE  
I am not your son

In the young man's face  
Molly studies the lineaments  
Of hard crusts and marg'  
Infested mattresses and threadbare coverings  
A face only a mother could love

ALFRED  
If you were you'd get a clip

MOLLY  
I know you

ALFRED  
Shut-up Molly nobody wants to hear from you

MOLLY  
But I've seen him

ALFRED  
Shut-up Molly

WILLIE  
Wagon B1B62

MOLLY  
I'm sure I know you



WILLIE  
I will shoot you dead  
All of you  
Starting with  
The prostitute

The gun in his milk-white hand  
Molly sneezes  
Willie gives a flinch

ALFRED  
Who died?

WILLIE  
What?

ALFRED  
That. There.

WILLIE  
No one

ALFRED  
Now listen son...

WILLIE  
I am not your son

MOLLY  
C96 Mauser.

ALFRED  
Shut up Molly.

MOLLY  
It is.

WILLIE  
Do not speak. Stop speaking. I will shoot you.

MOLLY

Integral box magazine in front of the trigger,  
the long barrel, the stability of a...

ALFRED

Shut-up!

MOLLY

German

ALFRED

Shut up Molly!

MOLLY

I'm just saying

TAMARA

Please. A drink?

MOLLY

Anyway who's he calling a prostitute?

TAMARA

I need a drink. Please

ALFRED

Yes. The lady must be thirsty

MOLLY

Did he mean me? Or her?

We don't have prozzies in Newcastle son

WILLIE

I am not your son, comrade

MOLLY

Anyway if anyone's the prozzie she is.

ALFRED

Why don't we all just have a little drink?

WILLIE

Drink is a curse.

ALFRED  
I've a flask of tea here.

In the hands of the thin boy  
The gun wavers  
Copies of ПРАВДА in his father's hidey-hole  
*Fine words are a mask to conceal shady deeds*  
*Take in the scene plan your course*

WILLIE  
You come with me

ALFRED  
I'm not to leave me post

WILLIE  
Give me that key and come with me

ALFRED  
Give her the tea

Molly looks at Alfred saying nothing  
Willie locks the door behind them

***Forth Banks***

Truck upon truck massed  
In narrow lanes of struck night  
Tabulations revved by war's merchants  
Covenants of industry  
The largest goods-yard in Europe

WILLIE

The army'll be with us  
Rifles, camera, action  
Like the films  
The films of everything  
Have you seen them at the pictures?  
Sometimes I feel like I'm going to explode

An enterprise Alfred can  
Neither condemn nor contain

In the rafters an owl's wheeze  
Readies whispering rats  
To measure distances  
Between bone and sleeve

WILLIE

Tanks will roll through the town, east and west  
We'll take the river, the shipyards

ALFRED

You seen a tank in action?

The impressed boy does not answer  
He searches for Wagon B1B62

***But if a woman have long hair***

Tamara's smooth and dirty neck  
Curling just short of her collar

Practical filaments charging air  
Corkscrewing from the lathe

Not like Molly's difficult bird's nest  
Pulled and caught  
Tumbled to the workshop floor  
Creaking in buckets  
Turned in mathematical precision

Apostrophe of massed crushable bone  
She is not the expected child  
Ground from Molly at the works

### ***Pocket of chalk***

*A man's face planed into rank earth  
Spread but contained still  
By geometry of sinew and bone*

*Armstrongs Whitworths Turners  
Ploughing tanks spelling  
Mother Whippet Hornet Revenge*

*Gun sights honed by Molly's crew  
Blind optics trash the Western Front*

*The eejit slips  
Perpendicular to a shell-hole  
His body sheered  
From his flattened fat head*

*Like you could burst out laughing  
In the Hall of Mirrors at the Hoppins*

*But don't because he's dead and  
Thank-God his mother won't see him  
She won't see him because that's him  
Right there in the road  
Gurning in a pocket of chalk*

*Clean Carriages*

WILLIE

What?

ALFRED

Nothing.

WILLIE

Where is it?

ALFRED

The Dead Sea must be the answer

WILLIE

Wagon B1B62

ALFRED

How the fuck should I know?

WILLIE

You work here

ALFRED

I'm just filling in. I clean carriages

WILLIE

You know where the keys are?

ALFRED

It's all salty. You can holiday there

WILLIE

You have bourgeois aspirations comrade

ALFRED

There'll be a patrol along soon

WILLIE

I need the rifles. The lads will be with us. Where is Wagon B1B62?

ALFRED

No idea

WILLIE

Where is the manifest?

ALFRED

You float and don't sink

WILLIE

I will use this gun

ALFRED

Be my guest son



*It is a glory*

TAMARA

Hungry

MOLLY

Are you from the estaminets and that?

Did you stand there waiting for it?

Got picked off the road?

TAMARA

I am hungry

MOLLY

He told me

For revenge

When he was drunk

When he got back. Down the Hydraulic. Mind we were pissed.

Never mix grape and grain

That's my advice

I like your hair

TAMARA

I like it too

The maid cut it

In the kitchen

From the fashion magazines

Lady Diana Cooper

Polaire

Irene Castle

Perfected it through days and days of revolution

Have you any money?

MOLLY

No, not money. I've not got money. You?

TAMARA

We are locked in here.

MOLLY

I've got...

TAMARA

By a madman and a station porter.

MOLLY

He's not a station porter. He washes the railway carriages.

Inside and out.

That's what he does.

Now.

He does that now.

TAMARA

Do you want to stay here and wait for them?

MOLLY

What else would we do?

TAMARA

Get out?

MOLLY

Pop the lock?

TAMARA

There must be something in here

MOLLY

I'm staying here. Fire's on. Comfy chair.

TAMARA

When is the next train to London?

MOLLY

Who do you think I am? A servant? A speaking timetable?

TAMARA

What?

MOLLY

That's a joke. I heard it at the Royal. Hetty King was on. She'd bobbed her hair

TAMARA

I'll bob your hair, with those scissors there

MOLLY  
Are they sharp enough?

TAMARA  
Sure.

MOLLY  
The girls and me. Me and the girls. We talked about it. In our breaks.  
Everyone loves Clara Bow.

TAMARA  
“Simmer down sugar. Take your foot off the gas”

MOLLY  
That’s right. Bebe Daniels. Now she’s the bomb.

TAMARA  
I’ll bob your hair.

MOLLY  
I’ll look stupid.

TAMARA  
You won’t.

MOLLY  
I’m too old

TAMARA  
No, like a movie star. Ready for action.

MOLLY  
Like Hetty King?

TAMARA  
Just like her

MOLLY  
Like a Jolly Jack Tar? Or a gaucho? I could go to Manchester

TAMARA  
You could go anywhere

MOLLY  
Go on then. Right here.

Molly slices the air at the nape of her neck  
An angle favoured by beheaders  
Tamara makes her first cut and Molly talks  
And once she starts she finds she cannot stop

MOLLY  
Before I was in the works  
I was in service  
I did not like my boots  
Five miles there five miles back  
The lady was particular about footwear for her girls  
Hard to stay clean, cleaning  
I put a little water by, but it would get used up  
I sweated all day  
I'd try not to raise my arms above my head  
Hard that in her library  
Dusting the shelves where she keeps  
Her 'radical literature'  
Kept out of the way of her children  
A friend to us she'd say  
But had to get her university degree  
Not allowed being a woman  
That was her priority  
But it would be the same for us all one day  
Just a bit sooner for her that's all  
The problem with us she said  
Is too many babies  
She wrote talks about it for her group  
She said I could come to a meeting  
If I'd had a shilling  
I nodded my head up on the ladder  
Thinking about all the things a bob could buy  
Stretching as far as I could on sore toes  
But without my elbows  
Leaving my side  
So she wouldn't  
Catch on and think me dirty

*Dead Sea*

ALFRED

If you want my advice son  
Take the rifles  
Wherever they may be  
Be my guest  
War's a big fucking game  
They kill my friends  
I promise to kill your friends  
And do all their girl-friends  
Head of the Nutting Squad  
Mutilate the intelligence  
Reduce that useless wasted flesh  
Drip by drip  
Bury them  
Up to their malnourished necks  
In snow and sand and shit  
Throw them from towers

WILLIE

What?

ALFRED

The Dead Sea. That's the place  
Great waves heaving dead

*Theatre Royal*

MOLLY

Up in the gods  
On stage a woman plays a bloke  
A drunk bloke about to get married  
A sailor adjusting his goolies  
Rolling baccy in his palm  
Trying to light a pipe  
Singing about saucy dames  
With Sankey hips and painted lips  
Getting carried away  
Burning her fingers  
Just at the right moment  
A bit of business  
What they call a bit of business  
Going to light her pipe  
But  
Remembering something to say  
Not lighting the pipe  
Singing  
She burns her fingers anyway  
Crowd love it  
Laughing their socks off  
She comes back on  
A cowboy  
Rolling a ciggie with one hand  
We're all stamping and cheering  
Off she goes with a wink  
Lassoing an imaginary steer  
  
That night in a doorway  
The deal got sealed

### ***King Edward's Bay***

Skitters in the walls  
Alfred so rafter-white  
Sinks to his knees

*Molly's hair fresh wonky curly  
Running down her back  
By the fire small belly baking  
At Monkseaton station  
Parades of smart new villas and maisonettes  
Her 'do' unravelling as we chat  
Making for the shiny sea  
Running to the shore  
Fine hair straight now  
In coastal drizzle  
I throw a draw-string wave  
That's gone before she's noticed  
Back against the wall  
Arse cheeks rearranging sand  
Give a lurch a tilt  
Squeaky boots fight for purchase  
Descending hair caught  
In crescent ocean  
Other hands are in the water  
I slide unwilling  
Quicksand to mud  
An arm a grinning jaw  
The rain gives up her bounty  
Of interred bones, the ragged heads  
The recently dead*

*Horosho*

TAMARA  
Do you like it?

MOLLY  
I can't see it. Feels nice.  
Is it not a bit short?

TAMARA  
*Horosho!*

MOLLY  
What?

TAMARA  
Good. It's good.

MOLLY  
Are you sure?  
Like the kinos

TAMARA  
We could bust out of this place  
Go to Montmartre, Pigalle

MOLLY  
Pig Alley?

TAMARA  
You could be my maid

MOLLY  
I could

TAMARA  
Harlem

MOLLY  
Is there not a mirror?

TAMARA  
I don't have one.



MOLLY  
Lost Property with no lost property.

TAMARA  
They've sold it all

MOLLY  
Feels *horosho* though.  
Very *horosho*!

Kicking off her boots  
Molly whoops a few-pounds-lighter tarantella  
Feet caught up with discarded hair  
Her accelerations knife the air  
She decelerates to a stop

MOLLY  
Alfred smells of potatoes  
Potatoes gone wrong  
In the clamp  
When the rain's got them  
Never comes off him

With the skill of a chef  
After sturgeon's eggs  
Tamara continues clipping  
Snipping away at her  
Mother's finest stitching  
The jewels shine  
In oyster-silk  
In the split lining  
Of the second-best coat

TAMARA  
We could get out of here.

MOLLY  
Are they real?

TAMARA  
Bona fide.

MOLLY  
Did you steal?

TAMARA  
No

MOLLY  
I've got something too  
Something I shouldn't  
Solid silver

## ***Zero Problem***

Turned one way  
Then the other  
The key shrieks in the lock  
Willie pushes in  
A winding-cloth

Of Alfred

This is as good a place as any to die  
*Three people three problems*  
*No people no problems*

At the battlements of Alfred's teeth  
Molly rams a silver spoon

The hinge of his jaw  
Relents a little  
A gentle lever  
Allows a gush  
A warm mess

## ***Beehive***

*He had fallen to his knees  
Outside the Beehive  
On the Bigg Market  
And shouted loud as he could  
Have my babies Molly Laing!  
The passing crowd laughed  
The girls lifted their skirts  
To walk over him*

***Enza***

WILLIE  
Will he die?  
You?

MOLLY  
What?

WILLIE  
Is it The Spanish?

MOLLY  
He's been like this since he got back

WILLIE  
You can die in a day.

TAMARA  
Did you find it?

WILLIE  
Not yet

TAMARA  
What are you looking for?

WILLIE  
Guns

TAMARA  
What will you do with them?

WILLIE  
Fight

TAMARA  
Fight what?

WILLIE  
The oppressors. Will you join us?

TAMARA

I might

MOLLY

People say it's a judgement from God.

WILLIE

Not God. Capital.

MOLLY

I know who you are!

WILLIE

What?

MOLLY

With the bits of paper. Outside the pub.

WILLIE

My leaflets.

MOLLY

You were crying. Who died?

WILLIE

To a pauper's grave.

This is our manifesto

Because the buying gives them happy eyes

The Ones Who Prospered

I am the message the vessel does not concern me

A republic for Workers Soldiers Peasants

A Federation of Free People

The destruction of Exploitation

Abolition of the Class System. Victory for Socialism. Abolish Private Land

Domestic Property, Fields, Forest, Meadows, Water, Mines

Compulsory labour to destroy the Class of Parasites. Reorganise Economic Life

The toiling masses will be Armed and the non-toiling class Disarmed

To Free us from the Yoke of Capitalism

MOLLY

Flowers maybe...

WILLIE  
Flowers are bourgeois

MOLLY  
Will you ban the flowers then?  
There's a woman in Eldon Square sells lovely purple ones  
He bought me a bunch once, well not a bunch more a posy  
Little delicate heads...

ALFRED  
Shut up Molly

MOLLY  
You're awake then

ALFRED  
Where's me suit?

MOLLY  
You know where it is

ALFRED  
Why didn't you collect it?

MOLLY  
I forgot

ALFRED  
I woke up and you were gone. Where did you go

MOLLY  
None of your beeswax

ALFRED  
What's happened to your hair?

MOLLY  
She cut it.

ALFRED  
It looks stupid.

MOLLY  
I was at the river...

ALFRED  
Stupid.

MOLLY  
With this revolution will the river be ours?  
And the works where I worked...

WILLIE  
Yes

MOLLIE  
We got kicked out.

WILLIE  
Comrade Lenin says "there can be no socialist revolution unless  
very many working women take a big part in it."  
But there must be discipline.

ALFRED  
They should go home and mind themselves and their babies, if they've got any.  
They're all twisted up, their insides don't work anymore.  
All twisted with the work.

MOLLY  
That's not true.

ALFRED  
Shut-up Molly.

MOLLY  
I have something to...

ALFRED  
No wants to listen Molly.

WILLIE  
Let the comrade speak.

ALFRED  
Her? Speak? She's got nowt to say!



MOLLY  
I got learned  
In one day  
Setting up  
On a twelve and a half inch lathe  
Dividing on change wheels  
Cutting the internal thread  
I hoist a six-pound tank gun  
Flying it through the works!

ALFRED  
What the fuck are you on about?

MOLLY  
What did you do? Eh? What did you do?

ALFRED  
I fought the bloody war!

MOLLY  
And what for? Eh? What for?

ALFRED  
I don't know what for!  
But not for a cunt like you!

*Aeroscope*

MOLLY  
Here.

Boy.

Take

These.

ALFRED  
What?

MOLLY  
Should buy you

A few

For your mother

For your revolution.

ALFRED  
No!

MOLLY  
Take them.

ALFRED  
Fucking no you pissed-up old hag

A lunge for the perilous spoons  
Willie raises the gun  
Tamara sinks inside  
Molly's hand rises  
Alfred at Willie's ear  
Shoot me, shoot me now

## **Mud**

*Following the frog, the crow, the mouse;  
A jackdaw learned to say  
“Bugger” “Hallo” and “Naughty Boy”*

*He had this easy way  
Like nothing was a bother  
Everything would stay similar*

*Shells bounced off him  
Dinking the dry earth  
Constellating his sunny brown head*

*Greengage in his teeth  
Valleying forward  
Every man-child boy*

*A crafter of songs  
What my mother called a dreamer  
Pot. Kettle. Black.*

*Anything is possible  
It's not though  
Don't believe them*

*Passchendaele took him  
He wasn't the only one  
To let a senior officer pass*

*Six-foot odd of Eton lad  
Stepped smartly off the duckboard into mud  
Up to his knees surprised but certain*

*The British Army would affect  
A prompt and efficient rescue  
He sighed and whistled for some help*

*Chaps mustered rope and brute force  
Their ministrations drowned by Berthas  
Birthing destruction two miles away*

*To no avail he was stuck there fast  
At the gawky boy's predicament  
Squaddies passed bellowing*

*A burly Scouser bequeathed a snout  
Assuring him they'd find some machinery  
To drag the daft lad out*

*By sunset he was still there  
Trying to be cheery  
As the mud absorbed his thighs*

*Some joker suggested cracking open  
His Fortnum and Mason's hamper  
And give him a bit of a 'do'*

*Sarge would not allow it  
Not with another 'hate' along the way  
"He's not coming out of there Watson*

*False hope and all that  
We'd have to cut his legs right off  
Mud's got him tight"*

*Third Battle of Wipers  
The ladies' fuses reigned  
Dowsing cries of mother in the night*

*The second day he was raving  
Begging for water, snatching at hymns  
But no-one dared take heed*

*In the night I crept towards him  
Lay on the shaft of a sinking wagon  
Close enough to hear his rattle*

*Just his head visible  
Lips over-running  
face  
Baring gravestone teeth*

*At the end the very end so dry  
I said for him to think of river  
Over flat grey rocks and pebbles*

*Flicks of tails and promises of trout  
Head tilted left, eyes rolling back  
He was very quiet*

*Took so long swilling mud  
I prayed for an act of a god  
To strike the plain to cracked baked bread*

*He leans to me, towards me  
With his beautiful mouth*

Shoot me shoot me now

*I had a little bird  
Its name was Enza  
I opened the window,  
And in-flu-enza*

## *Cyanosis*

The mahogany creeps  
Through lacey froths of sweat  
His mother's face  
Screwed closed

His father prays to a god  
He does not  
Believe in

### ***LOST PROPERTY MYSTERY***

A disturbing discovery was made yesterday morning at Newcastle Central Station after the recommencement of passenger services due to the cessation of national railway strike activities. The prone figure of what appeared to be a station-porter was found in a pool of blood sprawled on the floor of the Lost Property Office. The door had been locked. A police officer effected a forced entry. The room was in dis-array and locks of hair were strewn about. A small silver teaspoon was found beneath a chair. The unfortunate victim is believed to have been employed as a railway-carriage washer, but as yet no family members have come forward to formally identify the body. The police are appealing for witnesses to this shocking event.



**Visa**

*Stitch me into your coat*

*Travel me*

*Shear me*

*Through landing-stages*

*Tear me*

*Through barbed wire fences*

## ***Exit***

The comfort of a picked  
clean London train  
In borrowed boots  
Tamara stitches up her empty hem

Worn to a thread by her mother  
Retiring from the window  
Without a wave goodbye

Gathering ice in its paws  
The dog reappears  
An ice floe Ophelia

Tamara calls for his gun  
The blast crinkles and folds time  
A smashed plum

The dog risen again and gone  
With a jagged smile  
The comrade moves on

The ice eats itself together  
A ringing tooth-edged clatter  
A small spoon forcing a closed mouth

*but here Death is already chalking the doors with crosses,  
and calling the ravens, and the ravens are flying in*

*Anna Ahkmatova Why is this age worse...?*

***Pea-soup with ham***

Rowed into the shallows  
A canteen of battered spoons and jewels  
Headwinds for the pawn-shop

*They have no stomach for it*  
*These pea-soup fuckers*  
*Unfurl the flag and roll it up again*

*Fuck Newcastle and its comfortable poor*  
*Fuck all the useful idiots*  
*The dictatorship of proletariat*

Too late for the Spartacist Uprising  
De-train in Frankfurt  
Follow the torches

*Burn the books*  
*There's no good in them anyway*  
Throw professors from balconies

In the down-draft misery  
Erase them  
Scrawl them from the page

In time and in the right place  
For *Sturmtruppen* and  
The iron certainties of  
He who owns the youth

*At what wage does poverty begin...? These men are often somebody's labourers, or they may be carters, horse-keepers, porters, railway carriage washers, fish-fryers, and perhaps one may be a borough council sweeper on half-time. They are in regular work and receiving a regular wage, which means they are not in any sense casuals, though they suffer at times from unemployment and live in the dread of it.*

*Maud Pember Reeves Round About A Pound A Week*

***Alfred gets buried by a woman of the parish***

When it comes to their burials, disposals and that  
Know what is what on the scale  
From working poor to pauper

Some will argue they'll have the money next week  
But its cash on the nose before we even get the tack  
That horse does not leave this yard on a promise

Here are your weights and measures-  
To bury an infant:  
Twenty-eight to thirty shillings

Child is according to size:  
Two pound and five shillings  
Until the length of the body will not fit

Beneath the box-seat on which you sit  
Then the conveyance becomes necessary  
That's at a cost of four pound and four shilling

If the kid is really small  
The family will keep a sharp eye out  
For they're likely to get hid  
As they tumble  
Out of the cart  
Into the communal lot  
And there's no point moaning and giving out

I drive his horse and hearse  
This one is a man  
Nameless  
Numberless  
They keep coming

*It has been a strange perversion of women's sphere – to make them work at producing the implements of war and destruction [but] great hopes were entertained by many women that a new profession was open to them, where they could earn good wages and where they would have some scope for their skill and intelligence. But with the signing of the Armistice all such pleasant hopes were destroyed...*

*Lady Katherine Parsons The Shipbuilder 1919*

### ***Molly in the Machine***

Molly channelled to the whirr  
Hoist centripetal to the force  
and centrifugal flung  
To rest at the centre  
Of her beautiful  
machine

She climbs over Alfred and his small ways  
Into the thirteen and a half inch naval  
Of a hot metal husband  
Cleaner and lubricant borer  
Measurer and logarithmic patenter

Scar tissue at edges  
Tapping out hours on  
Philanthropic windows  
Salvation in warp weft and thrum  
Packed in moss litter  
Deposited with some agent of female reform  
She sleeps in useful industry

The sun shines through her  
onion-skin clean  
Logged into the ledgers  
Of St George's Asylum Morpeth

In want of a pound  
Bootless itinerant found  
Crying for her shorn hair  
Raving revolution



## **The Fugitive Archive**

Sukhanov had asked me if I had noticed  
the disappearance of all spoons as a symbol  
of the falling to pieces of the revolution.<sup>1</sup>

From my first conceptualisation of *The Disappearance of Spoons*, I intended the work to be informed by historical documentation from the First World War period sourced through desk-based research and research undertaken in the catalogues and the physical locations of local archives. Consequently, during the first two years of my doctoral studies, I undertook archival research in the main North East archival holdings at The Discovery Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, Woodhorn Colliery and Museum in Ashington, Northumberland, Durham County Record Office and in the library of the Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne. As will become clear, the limitations of what I found significantly affected the relationship between my creative work and my research in what I came to perceive as an overly masculinized and limited archive. I consulted a wide range of scholarly material on the subject of archives and archiving seeking for theoretical models which would help me frame my experiences. This archival and scholarly research underpins my critical analysis, which examines the challenges I encountered in the archive and interrogates the frustrations and opportunities archives present for creative practitioners and writers.

The early choices I made from my initial desk-based research and the biographical fragments I uncovered, including the above quotation from Arthur Ransome's published Russian journals, were highly significant in the formation of the characters who are given voice in *The Disappearance of Spoons*. However, these choices were augmented by research problems I encountered in the archive, particularly with regard to a subaltern female presence. My creative enquiry, which aimed to understand working-class female munitions workers contribution to the economic and social profile of Tyneside, was hindered by gendered omissions and obfuscations in the local archive. I also found that the male experience is foregrounded in the archival holdings which are presented to the public. There appeared to be an underlying institutional tendency to side-line and remainder the female experience which was central to my project. I came to understand these archival remnants as being fugitive in the archive – fleeting

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Ransome, *Russia in 1919* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013) p 127.

runaways whose presence could only be glimpsed in the liminal traces of the official record. This notion resonated with my research efforts to track the presence of and evidence for, a lost or disappeared female working-class voice – a voice which even when it was present was limited and mediated by the masculinized processes and character of the archive.

What follows in this introduction is an overview of the fragments, influences, specific creative choices, and theorizations which underpinned my creative and critical research journey through the backrooms and forgotten corners of the local archive and the wider expressions of the unremarked and apparently inconsequential subaltern female experience in academic and creative literature.

## FRAGMENTS

The question of Ransome's fugitive spoons, their disappearance and fugitive passage through history to, perhaps, end up in some back-water local archive, came to provide the central metaphor for *The Disappearance of Spoons*, and to represent and evoke the presence of significant absences in the local archive. During my archival researches it had become apparent that, not only dissenting employed working-class women and their representative's contribution was largely ignored, but also revolutionary activity on Tyneside during and after the First World War. However, additional to Ransome's perplexing spoons, four fragments of biographical information centred on the geographical location of Tyneside. The historical time-frame of the First World War and the Russian Revolution provided the foundation for the setting and the outline of the characters in *The Disappearance of Spoons*.

The first fragment I encountered was a reference to Tamara Talbot-Rice in Myers' *Literary Guide to The North East*.<sup>2</sup> In early 1919, the teenage Talbot-Rice passed through Newcastle's main railway station escaping from the chaos of civil war in post-revolutionary Petrograd en route to London. Her autobiography, *Tamara: Memoirs of St Petersburg, Paris, Oxford and Byzantium*, details her career as an art historian and archaeologist. However, early in the memoir, she briefly describes her encounter with a railway porter and his wife at Newcastle's Central Station. Talbot-Rice and her family could not travel onwards to the Russian embassy in London because of a national

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Myers, *Myers' Literary Guide: The North East* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 1995), p 94.

railway strike, so a station porter gave them refuge, putting them up for the night in his and his wife's tiny cottage. She writes: 'we eventually found a solitary porter [who] was difficult to understand and seemed to find us equally incomprehensible. It was getting dark [...] mistakenly assuming we were destitute, he led us to his wife'.<sup>3</sup> This memory takes up less than a page and the couple are never mentioned again. I began by creatively developing a version of Tamara Talbot-Rice as a young woman travelling alone from Russia to the North East without her family. Alienating her from immediate familial responsibilities allowed me to explore her interactions with others and reflect on the social, economic and political turbulence throughout Europe at the end of the First World War and Tyneside's relationship to those events. Through my engagement with Talbot-Rice's fragmentary recollection I had established a location and interlinked events: the end of the First World War, the Russian Revolution and a national railway strike. I also had a time scale for my cycle of poems and I had the beginnings of two fugitive characters: a Russian émigré and a railway porter.

I was to learn from subsequent research that the Baltic Route facilitated gun-running from Newcastle upon Tyne for both the revolutions in Russia of 1905 and 1917. Therefore, the next character central to *The Disappearance of Spoons* was suggested to me by the biographies of Willie Fischer, *Like Father, Like Son* and *The Kremlin's Geordie Spy* by local writer Vin Arthey.<sup>4</sup> It was here that I read details of the extensive gun and ammunition smuggling operations on Tyneside which served the revolutions in Russia. Fischer was an intelligent, manipulative and complex young man. He embodied the sense of the fugitive as an operation and operative of the state which was central to my creative and archival researches. Fischer's subsequent career as a spy and KGB colonel was infamous. He was captured in 1957 by the American authorities and sentenced to thirty years in prison. In 1962, after five years' incarceration, he was swapped for the American pilot Gary Powers who had been shot down over Soviet airspace.<sup>5</sup> Arthey sets out evidence of significant and comprehensive revolutionary activities by the Fischer

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<sup>3</sup> Tamara Talbot Rice, *Tamara Memoirs of St Petersburg, Paris, Oxford and Byzantium* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1996) p 79.

<sup>4</sup> Vin Arthey, *The Kremlin's Geordie Spy* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd 2010), Vin Arthey, V, *Like Father Like Son A Dynasty of Spies* (London: St Ermin's Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Fischer's experiences as a KGB spy were made into a film directed by Steven Spielberg: *Bridge of Spies* (2015). In this version no mention is made of Willie Fisher's formative experiences on Tyneside. His Northern roots are merely alluded to: he is given a vaguely Scottish accent, somewhat effacing the potentiality of the detail and nuance of his upbringing in the North-East of England.

family and associates in various locations on Tyneside. The Fisher's family history provides a glimpse of a marginalised sub-culture: an immigrant workforce co-existing with an indigenous one, inviting a reconsideration of the potential importance of Tyneside as a nexus of potential political change at the beginning of the twentieth century. The details provided by Arthey are compelling. He describes Willie's father, Heinrich Fischer, disavowing the Tyneside workers' appetite for revolution, claiming that when a Russian worker has pea soup with bacon it is a holiday feast, but when a British worker has pea soup with bacon, he considers himself to be almost starving.<sup>6</sup> This statement also brought a consideration of relative poverty to the political and social undercurrents of *The Disappearance of Spoons*.

I wished to explore why a potentially revolutionary moment on Tyneside failed to ignite, and why the actors in this drama of an unexplored historical moment prefer to accept stasis when all the appropriate conditions appear to be in place for radical change. This fatal lack of agency became embodied by a third character, Alfred. He is a returnee from fighting on The Western Front. I demoted him to a railway-carriage washer, the lowliest of low jobs, elevated for one night to the role of station-porter. He is a breaker of strikes by necessity. He is also desperate to forget the horrors he has witnessed and to resist any further calls to arms as instigated by the character of Willie's revolutionary prerogatives, no matter how compelling. The character of Alfred was inspired by the station-porter who assisted the Talbot-Rice family.

However, central to my research was his silent wife. She is behind Fischer's father's observation about pea-soup with bacon: the woman in the kitchen preparing and stirring the soup, the voiceless station-porter's wife providing tea and bread. A consideration of these traditional feminine roles led me to my fourth and pivotal character. Only a shadowy outline at first, she was in part generated by a quotation from Elaine Knox in her contribution: 'Keep Your Feet Still Geordie Hinnie' to a selection of essays entitled *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*. Knox claims that Tyneside female workers have been marginalised in the economic picture of the North East in a form of 'cultural mythology'. She states that: 'half of the region's population has been omitted from its history because of the assumption that women played no significant economic role. Yet to a large extent this assumption is as much a product of cultural mythology as

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<sup>6</sup> Arthey, *The Kremlin's Geordie Spy*, p. 66.

economic fact.’<sup>7</sup> Knox’s work explores the existence of a pervasive orthodoxy regarding working-class women on Tyneside and a need to promote their compliant domesticity because of the exigencies of the heavily-industrialised character of the area. Her examination of this cultural mythology which I came to see as also pervading the local archive provokes an engagement with a more nuanced characterisation of working-class women on Tyneside and an examination of the under-represented older woman. Further archival research revealed the importance on Tyneside and beyond of women’s work in munitions during the First World War and their subsequent unexpected dismissal at the Armistice. An unvoiced resentment expressed by one lone voice, speaking for these betrayed women, became a central concern of my creative and critical engagement. I put Molly to work in munitions and by 1919 recently made redundant from that employment. My engagement with her character and with her economic and social displacement was further reinforced by Jack Common’s memories of his mother in his autobiographical novel *Kiddar’s Luck*. In his work, a late Edwardian working-class woman is depicted as idiosyncratic and non-stereotypical. Common begins his novel thus: ‘She was a fool, of course, my mother.’<sup>8</sup> Common goes on to describe his parents’ unconventional courtship and to examine their conflicting personalities. His mother takes to the pub to escape her fraught marriage and family duties. She tells her son strange stories. Here was a woman confounding a cultural stereotype with her mysterious agency and in possession of an identity outside of the home. I wondered at the nature of this married woman’s conversations with her compatriots: what was allowed, and what was disallowed when she went to the pub during Common’s childhood immediately prior to the First World War? Molly would be an echo of Common’s uncommon mother. The aim of embodying the fractured nature of the presence of the female in the archive became a priority. Therefore, via the First World War material I encountered and a creative commitment to it led me to also engage with poetry and prose emerging concurrently and retrospectively from the concomitant period of Modernism.

## INFLUENCES

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Knox, *Keep Your Feet Still*, Geordie Hinny, *Geordies Roots of Regionalism*, ed by Robert Colls & Bill Lancaster (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp. 92 – 112. (p.95).

<sup>8</sup> Jack Common, *Kiddar’s Luck* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd 1990), p. 1.

I found within the relevant literature signs of rupture, absence and amnesia. For example, I noted the dis-junctional play between interiority and exteriority evident in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the mixture of mythic tropes and militarised vernacular in David Jones' *In Parenthesis*.<sup>9</sup> The anxious fugitive apprehensions in Katherine Mansfield's short stories and the 'quivering immediacy and glassy objectivity' of Jean Rhys' prose-poetry in early works such as *Good Morning, Midnight* suggested a tone and promoted an engagement with my research and practice which suited the dislocation of the post-Armistice psychological landscape.<sup>10</sup> Works produced in the early inter-wars years have, for me, a commonality with the absences of the archive, generated by what was described as 'The Great Silence' which followed the end of the First World War and came to have a revenant presence in the creative work I produced.<sup>11</sup> I aimed to mirror these processes in *The Disappearance of Spoons* by embodying a fragmentary and internalized experience by way of what Colum McCann the writer has characterised as the 'anonymous moment'.<sup>12</sup> These moments McCann asserts, these incomplete archival remnants are the building blocks of fiction and are necessary to the larger historical frame. Creative practitioners particularly from a feminist perspective must 'make it up to tell the truth', when working within a masculinized and commodified.<sup>13</sup>

Engaging with the literary expressions of Modernism uncovered a similar problem, but one which encouraged my creative pursuit of what I had come to value as fugitive voices. The problem, identified by Belinda Webb and others, is the archival and canonical 'absence of, and then, when she is there, the neglect of, the working-class woman.'<sup>14</sup> Working-class women have traditionally (and arguably still have) many demands made on their time and energy. Difficulties in accessing writing space and the added pressures of the availability of materials and resources and a lack of opportunities for publication disallow working-class women's creative contribution. Having the means to put pen to paper, to diarise or philologically express oneself can be understood as

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<sup>9</sup> T.S., Eliot, *Collected Poems*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1974), Francis Wyndham's introduction to Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, (London: Penguin Books 1983), Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Juliet Nicolson, *The Great Silence* (London: John Murray, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Alison Garden, 'Making it up to tell the Truth-An interview with Colum McCann', *Symbiosis: A Journal of Transatlantic Literary and Cultural Relations*, Volume 18.1 (May 2014), p.1-19, (p.8).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2012/mar/08/neglected-women-writers-class-issue>

being circumscribed by gender, ethnicity and class. It has often been the case that such women have facilitated the writing of others rather than undertaking writing of their own. Alison Light states in the preface to her interrogation of Virginia Woolf's relationship with her domestic staff, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* that: 'without all the domestic care and hard work which servants provided there would have been no art, no writing'.<sup>15</sup> Without the servant and working classes Virginia Woolf, now recognised as one of the great literary 'mothers' who 'revised the association of Modernism with masculinity', would not have been free to explore and express the modernist engagement with, for example, the anonymous and the random.<sup>16</sup> In Woolf's essay 'Modern Fiction' (1919), although writing from the context of creating a new literature, she states that: 'the moment of importance came not here but there'.<sup>17</sup> Woolf observed that random 'atoms' of life congregate around the principle that we do not necessarily recognise significance as it occurs, or that if we do, we are alienated from making sense of the experience.<sup>18</sup> For working class women it can be argued that, particularly during the era of the First World War and pre-universal suffrage, this lack of control over events was further augmented by the arbitrary and powerful functioning of the state in their economic and emotional lives.

At the end of the war with no bodies to mourn, no familiar death-rites to attend to, communities folded in on themselves. Finding themselves in an utterly unfamiliar world they maintained an outward show of a silent and stoic acceptance of the wholesale destruction they had experienced and witnessed. Margot Finn cites from Durham Labour M.P. Jack Lawson's autobiography (1932), in which he recalls attempts to console his mother at the loss of her elder son. 'Words of consolation died on the lips, for they seemed not to be heard. No-one ever saw her weep. Dry-eyed, apparently stone hard, she sat there, a picture of inarticulate suffering, defying description.'<sup>19</sup> Despite the gulf of privilege between Woolf and women of the same social status as Jack Lawson's mother this sense of alienation was key to my project, also the sense that if nothing was happening then, at least, nothing could happen. This meant that in constructing a

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<sup>15</sup> Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p xvii.

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Devoken, 'Modernism and Gender', *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, (New York: Cambridge, 1999) p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> [seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/PikliNatalia/VWoolfModernFiction.doc](http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/PikliNatalia/VWoolfModernFiction.doc)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, Margot Finn, Keith Wrightson, Colin Jones, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 270.



dramatic poem I needed to eschew what Oscar Wilde called 'melodramatic incident'. In defence of the absence of dramatic action, Wilde, soon to be fugitive himself, anticipated this condition when in 1895 he expressed the view that action had increasingly become confused with melodramatic incident.<sup>20</sup> To this end, according to Hill, Wilde has an equivalence and connection with Woolf in terms of their 'deep concern with the distinction between facts and truth'.<sup>21</sup> In *The Disappearance of Spoons* 'stuff happens' but not from a direction expected by the characters and without a comprehensible rationale.<sup>22</sup> For the characters there is an alienation between what has happened and the processing of what has happened.

## CREATIVE CHOICES

Therefore, it became apparent to me that the challenges of the material did not insist upon a well-made plot, but on the blank space present on the page and in performance. What was required was a form, rhythm and mode of expression which refracted the assumptions of the apparently narratively consistent archive. My extensive professional training and experience as an actor and director brought to the foreground of my creative engagement the significance of the gap – or the pause and what it is filled with. The hybrid form I created for this project moves between poetry, dialogue and slogans, avoiding over-exposition because as an actor and director I have a strong sense of the dimensionality of live performance. Performance happens and is felt in the interaction between the text, the actor and the audience. Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* describes this process as the 'two-way current'.<sup>23</sup> Performance encourages the audience to imaginatively occupy gaps and absences, to insert their own experiences into an imagined space, just as, one hopes, the reader attends to the empty poetical space on the page. Brook considered that 'deadly theatre' does all the work for the audience; it is performance as something to consume, to tick off the list rather than an exchange, a barter, a physiological and philosophical engagement, viewed as such has no monetary value. A play text may be publishable after its event, but what it felt like to participate is

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Burgess, 'A Talk with Mr. Oscar Wilde', *The Sketch*, 9 January 1895.

<sup>21</sup> Marylu Hill, *A Tale of a Table: Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, and the Legacy of Thomas Carlyle*, *Carlyle Conference, University of Edinburgh, 10–12 July 2012*, pdf, pp. 142-143.

<sup>22</sup> *Stuff Happens* by David Hare (2004). The play takes its title from a remark made by Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld when he was asked to comment on the looting in Iraq following the fall of Baghdad. "Stuff happens," he told reporters.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, (London: Pelican Books, 1980), p 29.

lost and can only be apprehended by testimony which may be fractured and incomplete, but nevertheless 'felt' and later surfaced in memory. The notion of bringing to light or surfacing subjugated histories has correlations with not only academic practice which engages with a problematic archive but also with the performance and creative practice which seeks to understand character and narrative by way of its 'given circumstances' – a term which I find useful for both disciplines and refer to throughout this critical enquiry. This process is mediated by the engagement with a performer's process of uncovering the clues and testimonies to a character's psychological motivation. It closely equates with both Carlo Ginzberg's experiential paradigm, which I discuss within 'theorizations' in this introduction and with Constantin Stanislavski's system of actor training. Stanislavski addressed himself to the notion of 'sub-text' and has his alter-ego Tostov state in *Building A Character* that sub-text: 'flows uninterruptedly beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existence. The sub-text is a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from "magic ifs", given circumstances.'<sup>24</sup> These include the circumstances of what we know, what we assume, what we can imagine as possible and what we can never know but apprehend on some level beyond rational thought – circumstances which are often fugitive.

*The Disappearance of Spoons* aims to attend the circumstances of 'the gaps of history [and meaning], the ways that facts may be interpreted in multiple ways.'<sup>25</sup> Structurally it features externalized poetic commentary on the characters' state of being; internalized monologues comprised of unshared memories and thoughts; stage-directions in a poetic form which shift the focus between character and location; inconclusive and frequently interrupted snatches and longer stretches of simple, sometimes demotic dialogue in which nobody says what they mean or, if they do, they contradict themselves, and are prevented from full expression or are shut down. The characters, the location and the wider world they have inhabited are all fugitives from their own realities and they are subject to a fugue state whereby the characters are both present and absent. It should be noted here that fugitive and fugue share the same Latin derivation: *fugere* to flee. This state is also exemplified by the technique of musical compositional in which a theme is introduced and, being successively repeated and developed. From these fragments something new emerges. My creative choices were

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<sup>24</sup> Teresa Brayshaw, Noel Witts, *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1996,) p 360.

<sup>25</sup> Hill, p. 142.

influenced by my archival search for its fugitives. The local archive and its processes and operations largely favour stereotypes which over time morph into archetypes, for example the brave soldier sacrificed to his duty, the down-trodden housewife who remains stoic through adversity. I wanted to present these received ideas of the historically unremarkable but subvert them by revealing to the audience the sub-textual workings of their inner worlds. This process mirrors my experience of analysing and pursuing the fugitives of the records, documents and ephemera beyond the bounds of their accepted archival characterisation. I sought to pursue them and their anonymous moments and reconfigure them into something at odds with their archival iteration – to subvert the dominant theme. For example, the character of Alfred is a man whose inherent decency has been fatally eroded by the carnage he has witnessed and is doomed to never forget. Therefore, Alfred presents an impotent expression of violent behaviour because he is unwillingly and unknowingly incarcerated in a heroic archive not of his own making. He is trapped in a cycle of inaction and compliance with the authorities he encounters, and reactive verbal and physical violence towards his wife, Molly.

Molly emerges, on a superficial reading, as an iteration of the traditional downtrodden woman. She conforms and apparently complies with the feminine model promoted by the dominant cultural mythology expressed in the local archive. Molly appears to be the epitome of the downtrodden and is a cipher for that state of being - she has been forced, by convention and by necessity, to exist in a contracted physical and emotional space. She has been written by others, she has no power and is used by others to achieve a particular purpose. But that space can no longer contain her. Even her inciting action of stealing the spoons is reactive and put to oppositional use by others. Her gesture is subverted by the readings of others. On closer inspection Molly seethes with heretical thoughts and feelings. A displaced woman embodying a complex and challenging picture of an under-represented female workforce, she sees no cause for celebration at the Armistice. She is someone for whom the war was a time of opportunity, but she has become a suicide in waiting, dispossessed of any noble convictions. She is disallowed a public voice; she is literally stopped from speaking by Alfred and the state he represents. Her impulsive action of stealing the spoons robs Alfred of his most treasured possession. These spoons are, like Molly, dispossessed. Subsequently pawned by Willie, they embody the mutability of artefacts and their

meaning in the archive - their archival provenance has been silenced. The spoons become fugitive in the archive, but in their very absence lies their significance. Molly's action of stealing then giving the spoons to Willie propels him to murder Alfred and that action thwarts any revolutionary possibilities enacted in the Newcastle Central Station Lost Property office on that night. This, in its turn leads Willie to the thwarted revolutions and subsequent authoritarianism of post-war Germany, Tamara to escape alone and Molly to the madhouse. The disappearing spoons provoke these journeys and are unwittingly initiated by Molly, a woman robbed of agency, struck by a fugue state and also, as the spoons are, subsequently silenced by the archive. She writes her own history with disastrous consequences.

## THEORIZATIONS

The four archival locations on Tyneside and in the wider area, although rich with detail regarding the industrial heritage of the area, their collections of material are predominantly focused on a masculinized experience of life and work. This embedded masculinization became a dominating theme of my critical engagement with archival practice and theory.

Jane Milligan states that in Second Empire France, when archival practice began to be consolidated, the notion of *publicité* required 'the objectivity (and masculinity) of its practitioners, thus closing down possibilities for other sources, methods, and bodies in history and historical study to be valued.'<sup>26</sup> If the internal workings of the archive are masculinised and ordered by a hierarchical sense of responsibility, then whose story is the archive telling, and to whom is that responsibility owed? The local archive appeared to, for the duration of my research visits, to confirm Milligan's view of the masculinized archive and to uphold Knox's argument that a 'cultural mythology' is in operation regarding women's economic contribution.<sup>27</sup> The depiction of the roles of women, apart from their traditionally domestic and occasional and exceptional industrial roles, are muted. Women, particularly working-class women, are significant by their relative absence. Women workers' presence is not denied, and it is sometimes celebrated, but its description lacks coherence and nuance. How was I to account for, and navigate my way

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<sup>26</sup> Jane Milligan, 'The Problem of *Publicité* in the Archives of Second Empire France', *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007) pp. 1-502, p 22.

<sup>27</sup> Knox, p. 95.

through this archival deadlock? I needed to look to and apply certain archival theorisations to bring together a disparate collection of archival fragments in a creative and critical endeavour which could bear the responsibility of 'making it up to tell the truth'.<sup>28</sup> It was important that the selected methodologies investigated and explored sub-textual hints and clues, as I attempted to identify fugitives of the archive and at least find an imagined home for them in an incomplete and unrepresentative historical narrative.

I found a theoretical model for orienteering a frustrating archival stalemate in the work of cultural and social historian Carolyn Steedman. In her 2001 compilation of eight essays *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Steedman's interest is in our understanding of the archive's relationship with its subjects. *Dust* derives its central metaphor from Steedman's engagement with Jacques Derrida's 1994 lecture *Archive Fever*. Derrida provides for Steedman a 'theoretical perspective on the institution of archives, the practices of reading and writing attendant on them, and the systems of regulation and coercion they have sometimes underlined.'<sup>29</sup> For Derrida, the archive is concerned with power: 'The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or represent law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house.'<sup>30</sup> Steedman asserts, however, that her experiences of being in the home of the archive are very different from Derrida's vision. She describes in her preface to *Dust* her scholarly endeavours to resurrect the lost voices of historical experience, for example, the voices of forgotten female diarists and underpaid chambermaids. This, she observes, involves a rather more quotidian occupation than the grand archival project and attendant fever suggested by Derrida. She is sieving through the *dust* of history searching for significant particles that imply an alternate narrative. Moreover, she avers that the 'record offices, libraries and repositories' with which she is concerned do not figure in Derrida's iteration of the archive. For Steedman, the engagement is with 'the unremarkable nature of archives, and the everyday disappointments that historians [...] will find there'.<sup>31</sup> This assertion challenges Derrida's notion of the archive as an inviolable house of

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<sup>28</sup> Garden, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.2

<sup>30</sup> Derrida & Prenowitz, pp. 9-10.

<sup>31</sup> Steedman, p. 9.

commandments. Her contention is that the study of more obscure and commonplace archives, particularly those attached to a specific locale, may reveal voices which have previously been submerged beneath the flow of archival record. She proposes that the historian working in the archive may be enabled to speak for and to marginalised experiences and disregarded cultural expressions through a reading from the smaller scope of the local archive to create a more representative and inclusive historical narrative.

Steedman approaches this marginal material from a feminist perspective. She aims to give voice to lost and obscured female experience, to bring individuality to an amorphous mass. She observes that it is in amongst the bills of fare, household expenses, magistrate courts, poor-house inventories, and the log-books of mental asylum institutions, that one can find the liminal evidence of women's lives as they were lived. Her unearthing of women's subjugated histories resonated with my own endeavour to give voice to the experiences of the apparently silenced First World War working-class female munitions workers and to afford them a singularity via the character of Molly. I aimed to reinstate these forgotten women to their proper place within the development of Tyneside's cultural and social landscape, and to restore an inheritance enclosed by the dominant masculinized iconography of heavy industry in the region.

Steedman's work reminds us, however, of the challenges inherent in the interpretation of the information which the local archive may contain about women's past lives and experiences. She acknowledges that much of the material she studies was generated by systems of oppression, examples of what Steedman calls 'enforced narratives of self', a narrative typified by the records of the English legal system.<sup>32</sup> Administration of this system produced innumerable records of women's 'stories' and were maintained by magistrates in their log books forming a large portion of the body of the local archive. These stories provide the researcher with information about women who are under the threat of the workhouse, but only by their troubles are these women known. The telling was not voluntary, their stories were conditioned by the transactional necessity of compliance within an authoritarian structure empowered to confer the restitution of unpaid wages or minimal welfare provision. Steedman asks her reader to consider this procedure as a matter of theft and she notes 'the ordinariness of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

these proceedings: having had the story taken, it was not returned [...] but rather left behind, in the case books and the Archive.’<sup>33</sup> Steedman’s work provides a reminder that much of the content of the archives may be considered ‘enforced narration’ and that the truth of circumstance hunted for.

Steedman presents her readers with an image that equates the work of the archival historian with that of the hunter of the fugitive. She describes ‘a figure solemnly hunched over a list of names compiled a long time ago for a purpose quite different from the historian’s, he or she in determined pursuit of one of the lost ones.’<sup>34</sup> In the modernised local archive, along with these multitudinous legal records, other ephemera are also left behind; objects, media, personal journals, remaindered fixtures and fittings, clothes, postcards and bequests. One assumes that these accumulations, unlike forced narrations, may hopefully provide a wealth of unenforced detail. But the detail available is particular to how the archive is framed and what the archival authority chooses to focus on. For example, my own research difficulties in searching for working-class female workers voices in a local archive composed and governed by the past priorities of an overwhelmingly male industrial powerhouse. Fortunately, Steedman’s theorisations empower this apparently quotidian archival research placing a small story at the centre of the bigger picture, making room for affect and subjectivity, with the aim of negotiating the limitations of the apparently objective and impartial archive.

The archives I explored for this project threw up a variety of seemingly random ephemera associated with working class women: an obscure archival sources booklet, a small piece of ivy, the fragmentary oral history of a pair of football boots surrendered at the end of the First World War and the memoirs of a largely forgotten local figure, all of which I discuss in the following chapters. On first encounter, some of these objects and information appeared disappointingly obtuse, disconnected and superficially incidental lacking the hoped-for significant detail. Steedman notes that the archive is packed full with the debris of the past: ‘You think: these people have left me *the lot*: [...] Not a purchase made, not a thing acquired that is not noted and recorded’.<sup>35</sup> With regard to this statement and in the light of my specific interests there were references by others to the women that I was searching for embodied by Molly, but no personal testimony from

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. x – xi.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

the women themselves, no apparent insight into their possible motivations or concerns. However, as Steedman reminds us: 'if we find nothing, we find nothing in a place; and then, that an absence is not *nothing*, but is rather the space left by what is gone: how the emptiness indicates how once it was filled and animated'.<sup>36</sup> I was to find indications and evidence for an alternative inhabiting of this archival nothingness, but for the time being my subjects seemed to be disappeared and effaced in an archive without witness to them and their struggles. Had some archival crime been committed? As a police detective may state about a criminal offence; without a witness to make a corroborating statement, there is no victim and without a victim there is no crime.

To further understand the significance of this paucity of evidence I turned to another account of archival research for critical assistance. Carlo Ginzburg the Italian historian and proponent of *microstoria* proposes in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* that those uncovering unremarked histories in the archive must 'resemble the detective who discovers the perpetrator of a crime [...] on the basis of evidence that is imperceptible to most people.' As already discussed with regard to Stanislavski and his use of 'given circumstances', Ginzburg allies the researcher, the detective and the psychoanalyst in his historical paradigm by speculating on the human capacity for story-telling and our ability to attend to the importance of tiny and apparently inconsequential details.<sup>37</sup> He considers this process as emerging from the necessity to repeat the clues and signs needed for survival in the hunt for food:

Man has been a hunter for thousands of years [learning] to reconstruct the shapes and movements of his invisible prey from tracks on the ground, broken branches, excrement, tufts of hair, entangled feathers, stagnating odours [to] sniff out, record, interpret, and classify such infinitesimal traces as trails of spittle. He learned how to execute complex mental operations with lightning speed.<sup>38</sup>

Despite Ginzburg's persistent use of the male pronoun for all of this narrational survival strategy his considerations are useful to the process of searching for the remains of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press 1992) p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Ginzburg, p. 102.



undistinguished in the archive. For Ginzburg this investigative tendency is mirrored not only in the processes of the detective, but also in those of psychoanalysis. He quotes from Freud's essay, 'Moses of Michelangelo', in which he observes that 'the technique of psycho-analysis [...] is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details, from the rubbish heap as it were, of our observations.'<sup>39</sup> Ginzburg reflects on Freud's words, and concludes 'Freud himself tells us: it was the idea of a method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, [that was] considered in some way significant.'<sup>40</sup> Ginzburg's discourse in this chapter and his illumination of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis shifted my sense of the nature of the archival research I was undertaking. It was reassuring to me that a creative sense could be distinguished in the random, discarded, marginal, and apparently trivial details which might provide valuable clues in my search for these fugitive lives. It made it seem possible that through these details the barely recorded fragments of lives might be reconfigured into an imagined whole in the character of Molly, the cooker of pea-soup, the silent or silenced munitions worker. Through her I could speak to the moment and define a place for her which contested the easy comforts of a sentimentalised shelter constructed of received opinion, description freighted with historicity and lacking in emotional responsiveness. It is a commonplace assumption that the archive is a useful resource for the creative writer and practitioner seeking to illuminate an historical moment, and that *of course* the writer seeks significant detail by burrowing into the debris of history. It is, self-evidently, what a creative practitioner does. If one cannot find the relevant details of lost lives in the narrow and confined space of the archive, then make it up – it is your job. However, for my own critical engagement with McCann's notion of 'making it up to tell the truth', I required an iteration of archival theory which accounted for and legitimised a subjective relationship to the ignored and contested remnants of the archive and one which enabled me to analyse the question of why the historical record and its agents did not appear to care for or nurture its fugitives. Marika Cifor addresses this question by positioning affect theory as an essential way-marker for archival research. She asserts affect theory is a 'significant way in which dimensions of social justice for archival scholarship, practice, and professionalism can be elucidated, fleshed out, and ultimately

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid p. 101.

confronted.’<sup>41</sup> As an approach to cultural and political history, affect theory focuses on the impact of nonlinguistic forces on behaviour, or on affects which are beyond our conscious control. The psychologist Sylvan Tompkins, who was originally a playwright, developed his theory of affect which recalls Brook’s ‘two-way contact’ as an expression of the physiological responses that lie beyond an audience’s or a subject’s conscious control. The actor’s expression of the text and its attendant proxemics bring the performance ‘alive.’ As Donovan Schaefer asserts ‘a play’s success is measured by its ability to deliver a feast of affects.’<sup>42</sup> For feminist and post-colonial intersectional archival theorists such as Cifor, this understanding of the intangible forces operating beyond or below the records has, ‘become a major focus and [can] be approached clinically, phenomenologically, or critically.’<sup>43</sup> For its proponents in archival studies an acknowledgment of affect, both as a noun and a verb, allows the ephemeral and fugitive traces of non-traditional sources to tell an affective story which restores the Other to a place in the historical record and demands an archival restorative justice for our ignored and suppressed stories. Cifor asserts that the discipline of historical study has traditionally ‘had a central preoccupation with the actual and the tangible [with] a profound distrust of stances that seem less than objective and of aspects relating to records and archives that invoke affective responses.’<sup>44</sup> The archive legitimises its methodologies within a context of objective science. The use of affect theory within the archive incorporates feminist investigations of the liminal stories to be found in non-traditional archives it offers a sense of restoring from Steedman’s enforced narrations what was stolen and never returned.

However, some archival researchers distrust the co-opting of terminology from other disciplines to somehow justify archival science’s existence within what Lisa Fluet terms the disciplines of ‘*postcritique*’ humanities.<sup>45</sup> This is a process by which archival science encompasses ‘a critical mode that transcends suspicion, and the ideological reduction of collected materials to a specific politics.’<sup>46</sup> This promotes a notion that the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> <http://donovanschaefer.com/what-is-affect-theory>

<sup>43</sup> Cifor, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Marika Cifor and Anne J Gilliland, ‘Affect and the archive, archives and their affects: an introduction to the special issue’, *Archival Science*, Volume 16, 2016, 1– 6, (p. 2).

<sup>45</sup> [Lisa Fluet](#), ‘Rethinking Dust: On Carolyn Steedman, Archival Studies, and Critique’ *Politics/Letters*, Issue 13, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

archive as a concept, as opposed to its physical entity, is in some way infected with a disease of privilege with which it must be cured by a dose of post-structuralist medicine.<sup>47</sup> The so-called *affective turn* may see the archive as being bad to the core and consider that it can *only* be rehabilitated by affective reinvention. Clare Hemmings considers that affect as applied to archival theory may bring an overly dyadic or binary relationship, which in an archival context may tend to divide affects into either good or bad. The effect of affect may produce the predetermined conclusion that the archive operates as a malevolent organ of a repressive state actively seeking to suppress alternate or argumentative iterations.

For my creative and critical purposes, it is my contention that affect theory in an archival context cannot operate exclusively. Archival affect theory is valuable when it embraces the wider context of cultural theory and contexts. It is not the only approach to an understanding and appreciation of the historical impact of the Other.<sup>48</sup> Without the underpinning of attendant theorizations from which affect theory in the archive derives some of its terminology and epistemological constructs, the use of affect theory as a critical tool can be a reductive cul-de-sac. For example, the physical location of an archive and the operations attendant on its survival are as much drivers of the archive's persistent lack of inclusivity as is its position within a state apparatus. Even when not considered an organ of repressive regimes the archive is, by necessity, in its very construction, operation and practices, a delimiter and disqualifier of choice and agency. The archive is only able to present a narrow spectrum of lived experience, because the predetermined narrative of an historical moment is expedited and conditioned by supposed archival i.e. quantifiable value. What the archive can financially afford to privilege is often determined by the narrow confines of available funding from public and private bodies. Just whose story is it most important to privilege in order to uphold the archive's sanctioned position as the determinant of responsible citizenship? Therefore, the archive may unwittingly deny a subaltern *dramatis personae* access to their own archive of feelings. In the archive there is a disallowance of the potential of

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<sup>47</sup> The body of thought which examines that at any given moment and theoretical understanding we experience only limited aspects of the world and some of what we experience is based on falsehoods embedded in some of the discourses we have learned.

<sup>48</sup> I use this term in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's description of a male-dominated culture which represents woman as the sexual other in relation to man. The sexual Other is a minority, the least-favoured social group and defined by limiting criteria.

these affective internalized heresies and conflicts, otherwise chaos might ensue. What affect theory and the other theorizations utilised here offer in the following critical analysis of four archival locations is an opportunity for the critical application of the primacy of apparently inconsequential and sub-textual detail. Affect theory is a legitimisation of the practice of felt and imagined presence: we were here, we did exist. But, like the inconvenient dust, we were swept under the carpet of the historical record. However, this persistently gendered narrative is changing; creative and academic scholars with an intersectional and affective focus have investigated the archive and begun to change our notion of what our story is. Affect theory in the archive opens the gates of Derrida's *archons'* palace and allows the absences that Steedman identifies to speak, feel and bear witness.

As examined by Steedman, for Derrida, the archive is concerned with power and its retention; the archival process constrains that which is archived by processes of *commencement* and *commandment*.<sup>49</sup> However, although framed by the post-modern considerations of the archive sign-posted by Derrida and a subsequent *archival turn*, obscured fugitive absences, possibly self-censored, and expressed by limited catalogued traces in the institution of the archive may be resurfaced when given an empathetic engagement which reads between the lines and interpolates itself into the previously anonymous moment. A fugitive life as it is or has been lived perhaps can only be apprehended by an act of imagining; by an affective, creative, feminized and sub-textual engagement, even though that engagement and its presence may be as short-lived and fleeting as the fugitives it seeks.

In Chapter One of this critical analysis, and with particular reference to women's contribution to Tyneside's industrial development during the First World War, I engage with the Discovery Museum's extensive holdings. My research in the museum provoked me to further my understanding of the nature of the representations of working-class female employment culture and practice on Tyneside, by engaging with Cifor's understanding of Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism' which can deny inclusivity and promote uncritical operations in the archive and which Sara Ahmed maintains should serve as a more effective witness to its fugitives in order to restore civic justice and fair representation. In Chapter Two I examine my research experience at Woodhorn Colliery

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<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, & Eric Prenowitz, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics*, 25(2), (1995) p. 9.

and Museum on the site of a former coal mine. This provided further traces of an equally marginalised experience within a predominately masculinised and monumental location. Here I examine marginalized affect in archival discourse as explored by Catherine Bishop and, in particular her understanding of the push towards a new visibility for the archive's itinerants, alongside Antoinette Burton's examination of the processes of what becomes sanctioned as being of archival value. Michelle Caswell understands archival community projects as promoting a community's self-awareness which differs from that mediated by the archival record. This argument is developed in Chapter Three by my critical engagement with the place of disregarded oral-histories within the archive. My research at the Durham County Record Office was also to provide relevant significant detail to add to the developing character of Molly alongside the opportunity to examine the significance of oral histories to women's studies and working-class women's disruptive place in the cultural mythology of Tyneside and the North-East. In Chapter Four I am afforded time with a deceased, relatively unknown local female writer and activist at the Literary & Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Kate Eichhorn's analysis of relatively unmediated sources and the pressure exerted by what she terms as an 'authorizing apparatus' is a key component to my understanding of the uses that can be made of the archive.<sup>50</sup> With the continuing aid of feminist and affect theory perspectives on oral histories, the occlusions which I had considered frustrating began to liberate rather than limit my creative and critical endeavour. With the aid of the theorizations outlined above which develop the pioneering explorations of Derrida, Steedman and Ginzburg and with the wider context of an understanding of archival location and framing, I examine the complex negotiation possible within the archives' limitations, difficulties of access and privileging of content.

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<sup>50</sup> Kate Eichhorn, 'D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production Since 1990', *Women's Studies*, 39(6), (2010), p. 640.

## **Chapter 1. The Discovery Museum**

For if the official archive is a workplace, it is also a panopticon whose claim to total knowledge is matched by its capacity for total surveillance. This makes archive users into stealth strategists.<sup>51</sup>

*Burton Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*

The architecturally imposing Discovery Museum is situated at the western edge Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The weathered, copper-domed towers and art deco interior speak to the building's former life as the headquarters of the North-East branch of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. Its magnificent dining and entertainments hall, numerous stained-glass windows and elaborate marble staff rest-rooms elevate to co-operative magnificence the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.<sup>52</sup> Now owned by the city, it holds the Tyne & Wear archives and has been re-branded as The Discovery Museum. Its website sets out a partial history stating that: 'In 1977 the Co-op moved out and in 1981 the building was taken over by the museum.'<sup>53</sup> The building and institution is dedicated to the grand scale of predominantly masculine ingenuity and industry on Tyneside, and its fin-de-siècle aspirational architecture with free entry to all would appear to speak to a contemporary accommodation with subaltern political and economic struggles of the past.

As visitors enter the building, Charles Parsons' steam-turbine powered *Turbinia* dominates all. Designed in 1884, it is a streamlined and stealthy presence. Demonstrated at the Spithead Naval Review in 1897, it was the first and fastest ship of its kind in the world. Measuring over thirty-one metres, *Turbinia* commands the ground-floor of the Discovery Museum and can be seen from all levels of the airy atrium. The building and vessel are contemporaneous and suggest the ambitions of Tyneside's military/industrial complex and workforce moving forward into a new century together. The innovations of

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<sup>51</sup> Antoinette Burton et al, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, (Durham (North Carolina): Duke University Press Books, Kindle ed, 2006) loc: 255-263.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.uk.coop/the-hive/is-a-co-op-right-for-you/getting-started/co-op-movement/values-principles>

<sup>53</sup> <http://blog.twmuseums.org.uk/discovering-the-history-of-the-co-op/>: This entry omits a significant aspect of the building's history for as is further available to view in their collections database the Discovery was home to a long established young people's theatre company that was, as the collection reference states: 'TyneWear Theatre-in-Education [...] established in 1979, initially as the education branch of TyneWear Theatre Company (successor of Tyneside Theatre Company). [...] moving to Blandford House, Newcastle in 1981, [becoming] in 1987, [...] Tyne and Wear Theatre-in-Education [...]', there is also a reference to this usage here: <http://www.tyneandweararchives.org.uk/DServe2>

*Turbinia's* creator, Charles Parsons, still govern the ethos of the presented collections. In monumental and theatrically-lit glass display cases, models of the ships designed and built in the Tyneside shipyards, by a male workforce, are displayed. Archival film, photographs, blueprints and accompanying rubrics testify to the details of men's work in mining, ship-building and engineering. Materials relating to the river and its productivity are everywhere and the building resonates with the quiet dominance of *Turbinia*, a quiet punctured by joyful shouts from visiting children echoing through the immense space. Noisy children are tolerated in the spirit of a modernized co-operative inclusivity embodied in a contemporary museum experience which encourages repeat visits from families.

The contemporary museum experience characterises its visitors as 'customers', consumers of a 'feel good' archival experience. Historic, economic and social inequalities are presented in the archive as products of a bygone age which although celebrated and memorialized are conditions belonging to the past which will not be returned to. We have progressed as a nation and live in the full anticipation of the continuation of the good life and the maintenance of the status quo. Cifor applies Berlant's theorization of 'cruel optimism' to this function of engagement in the archive by which 'customers' are presented with a 'mode of living or object [which] promises a good life, but [...] is actually an obstacle that prevents them from flourishing.'<sup>54</sup> The archive serves as a reminder of the conditions we have escaped, replaced by a value system upheld for the good of society. This expression of prescribed and embedded societal values is clearly stated in the governmental foreword to the consultation document 'Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life', quoted by De Groot in *Consuming History*.<sup>55</sup> Written in 2005, by the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell, the foreword states that: 'Museums and galleries tell the story of this nation, its people and the whole of humanity [...] the values of the Enlightenment kept alive for each generation.'<sup>56</sup> However, in the twelve years since Jowell's optimistic statement, museums have increasingly had to scramble for financial survival. To this end, as De Groot and Cifor demonstrate, museums have reinvented their public-facing profile and the purpose of their archives and the buildings that house them as 'venues for hire,

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<sup>54</sup> Marika Cifor, 'Affecting relations: introducing affect theory to archival discourse', *Archival Science*, Volume 16, 2016, 7 – 32, (p. 24).

<sup>55</sup> Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), p 236.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236.



lending a complex cultural imprimatur to corporate proceedings.<sup>57</sup> This network of cultural pressures can be seen foregrounded on the Discovery Museum website's homepage with links to its varied use as a venue for weddings and conferences.

Cifor asks us whether 'operating uncritically within the status quo is [...] the best response for archives or society's long-term thriving.'<sup>58</sup> Visitors to museums must leave the building in an optimistic and uncritical state of mind, a state of mind which also encourages not only a return visit, but a visit to the prominently positioned gift-shop on their way out. We are invited by De Groot to consider whether this monetisation of heritage 'leaches museums' independence away.'<sup>59</sup> Visits to museums are problematized for consumers by what De Groot calls 'the incredibly complex ways that one might engage with the collections at a level other than simply visiting.'<sup>60</sup> The majority of people who pass through the Discovery Museum and queue for the canteen-style food served in the reasonably priced café are oblivious to a potentially subversive archival relationship. The outer and private reaches of the museum are stacked with a multiplicity of materials, of which the visitor will only ever glimpse a tiny fraction, remaining ignorant of a significant muting from within the archive of an alternative experience to the sanctioned elements on display.

The contents of Discovery's archive are stacked 'backstage' behind secured doors on fourteen kilometres of shelving. However, even for a researcher invited to engage with the materials, only a selection of items can be offered up for investigation. Lists are generated, and references given, but one keenly feels the immensity of the archive, and its dizzying array of what Steedman characterises as being 'all the inchoate stuff – that has ended up in the archive.'<sup>61</sup> 'Stuff' with little apparent use or purpose and locked away from the general public. Problems of access are compounded by the fragility of the materials and documents, making unsupervised large-scale access impractical. Therefore, most of the contents may never see the light of day. The materials are safeguarded for the public, at the public's expense, but the irony here is that the public are not trusted to handle these objects: only a sample is offered for visitors to interact with. According to Caswell and Punzalan this partial and inadequate interaction should

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>58</sup> Cifor, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> De Groot, p. 241.

<sup>61</sup> Steedman, p. 149.

necessitate a re-framing of the archivist and any institution's role. To give cultural relevance and meaning to the archive a 'larger societal participation in archival endeavours' should be encouraged in which archivists would be called on to 'relinquish their role as authoritative professionals in order to assume a more facilitative role in crucial archival practices of appraisal, description, and development of access systems'.<sup>62</sup> Until this reconfiguration is brought about, these artefacts are fixed in silent and hidden preservation and the experiences they attest to are sometimes entirely forgotten in the archive. Caswell develops this argument in her 2013 riposte to Mark Greene, 'Not Just Between Us', and posits that archival records are not impartial bystanders to human activity but are 'discursive agents by which power and the complex nature of power is both exercised through and reflected by documentation.'<sup>63</sup> Viewed this way archival materials can become agents of change because of their potential to promote dialogue. What became apparent, for me, was a discursive absence, a power vacuum in my search for evidence of the experiences of the World War One female munitions workers on Tyneside. My initial research had yielded some fragments of information, but my experience of the museum continued to raise many more questions about the nature of the institution and the construction of the archive and its apparent neutrality.

In demonstration of this imbalance of power the Armstrong archive at the Discovery had yielded only one slim volume which addressed the work of female munitions workers on Tyneside in some way. Published anonymously, *The War Work of Sir WG Armstrong Whitworth and Co* has a final chapter entitled 'Miscellaneous' which contains one short paragraph devoted to the employment of women in the Armstrong Whitworth munitions works on Tyneside during the First World War. It describes the inclusion of women in the work practices of the time thus: 'Unskilled hands were trained to do work that formerly had been exclusively carried out by skilled. Wherever possible female labour was substituted [and] the proportion of employees may, during the last two years of the war, be taken as being about 50,000 men and 20,000 women.'<sup>64</sup> No definitive statement is offered as to what the processes were that rendered 'unskilled

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<sup>62</sup> Michelle Caswell and Ricardo L Punzalan, 'Critical Directions for Archival Approaches to Social Justice', *The Library Quarterly*, 2016, 86(1), 1-18, p 4.

<sup>63</sup> Michelle Caswell and Mark Greene, 'Forum: Not Just Between Us: A Riposte to Mark Greene', *The American Archivist*, Fall/Winter, 2013, p. 605.

<sup>64</sup> Anon, *The War Work of Sir WG Armstrong Whitworth and Co*, Newcastle upon Tyne, c 1920, p 49.

hands' skilled. The figures quoted may also underestimate the total number of women employed locally, therefore further minimising their contribution. The most reliable figures for the entire country, according to Woollacott in her work *On Her Their Lives Depend*, were published in 1919 by the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry: 'It calculated that the number of women employed in industry *increased* between July 1914 and July 1918 by 792,000 from 2,178,000 to 2,970,600.'<sup>65</sup> By 'industry' the statistic refers to munitions and its attendant services. These figures are also an estimate; female workers came and went and were not always accounted for.<sup>66</sup> Across Tyneside there were many *ad hoc* ventures set up which repurposed existing small engineering works, and the Armstrong Whitworth figure does not account for the women employed in other operations such as those at Parsons Engineering Works, or the other engineering and munitions operations on Tyneside. There are figures, however, which enumerate a summary of output of the vast quantities of munitions processed by the workforce at the Armstrong-Whitworth Works: 'Shells 14,500,000, fuses – 18,500,000, cartridge cases – 21,000,000, assembled ammunition 12,500,000, luddite block charges – 4,400,000, filled shells – 3,000,000.'<sup>67</sup> These statistics give an indication of the scale of the work undertaken, but no illustration of the training provided for the women. This anonymous document, as Caswell proposed in 2013, raised many dialogical questions with heuristic potential. How were these women trained? How skilled did they become? Did this experience in munitions affect these women's perceptions of themselves? What hopes were fostered by the women called to the cause of the war effort? Why had their contribution been apparently devalued to a footnote within the archive? How did they react to their summary laying-off in 1918? Woollacott writes of widespread protest by female munitions workers in London, marching for 'immediate guarantees for the future'.<sup>68</sup> Did this schism between the women workers and their employers on Tyneside created by the end of the war go unvoiced? Dissent was evident elsewhere in the country, as further demonstrated by evidence from *The Times* newspaper of November 20<sup>th</sup> 1918: 'about six thousand women munitions workers, coming chiefly from Woolwich Arsenal, but complemented by others from munitions factories all over

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<sup>65</sup> Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War*. (London: University of California Press 1994) p 18.

<sup>66</sup> Woollacott, p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> Armstrong Whitworth, p. 50.

<sup>68</sup> Woollacott, p. 107.

London, marched on Parliament to convey to the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Munitions their demands'. Did the women of Tyneside and in the related works across the North-East not feel compelled to protest? Were they more compliant than their South-East counterparts?

Although the voices of local women employed in munitions and their potential dissent remained unheard at the Discovery Museum, their presence can be seen in a collection of archival images held at there with which I was given some time. The images belied this apparent silence. In these photographs, the female munition workers look at us in a direct, powerful and fully present fashion. They do not appear cowed by their surroundings or responsibilities, in contemporary parlance they 'own' their habitus. They are *in situ* on the factory floor, or outside in the works yard. Irrespective of the performative aspect of posing for photographs, the image on the following image provokes a question of given and affective circumstance: 'How do you feel?' The female workers address the camera with an unflinching gaze. They seem to be indicating 'I feel happy, powerful, what of it?' Required to hold the pose for a considerable length of exposure time this is a group effort reinforced by the evidence of only one blurred face.



**Fig 1.1 Discovery Museum Image Collection: TWCMS 2014.1259**

This image is in direct contrast to several other photographs from the same time and location where female workers are arrayed around the 'boss', complete with a tiger-skin rug in prominent position at the knees of the prone women in the front row, as seen next.



**Fig 1. 2: The Discovery Museum Image Collection: TWCMS 2013.2048**

These women are solemn and unsmiling, presumably displaying a gravitas appropriate to the seriousness of their war-work. They are posed around a man, who is central, and they his apparent trophies. Both sets of photographs at the Discovery Museum lack any other contextualising information apart from dates and general location. The photographs belong to what Cvetkovich describes as being part of relatively uncontested and obscure collections of materials which constitute an alternate archive.<sup>69</sup> She further argues that these ‘cultural texts,’ are ‘repositories of feelings and emotions’.<sup>70</sup> The Discovery photographs of the women workers provide opportunity for conjecture as to the psychological hinterland they inhabit, but archival answers to the questions of consequence implied in these photographic representations remain unanswered, unquestioned, unvoiced. Their meaning and significance narratively un- ascribed in the archive. The contrast promoted by Ginzburg’s notion of analysis between

<sup>69</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, ‘In the archives of lesbian feelings: documentary and popular culture’, *Camera Obscura*, 2002, 49(1), 107–147, p. 121.

<sup>70</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An archive of feeling: trauma, sexuality and lesbian public cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 7.

the two photographs remains unexplored. Cifor would infer that the photographs must have 'affects encoded within their content in meaningful ways'.<sup>71</sup> Decoding this content despite a lack of archival detail would allow a story to surface which otherwise would remain submerged, allowing the facilitation of an understanding of these archival remnants as fleeting glimpses into previously obscure circumstances of being and the feelings attendant on a subordinate lived experience. As Cifor notes, to promote social justice within the archive, there is a necessity to acknowledge the growing concern amongst archival and cultural theoreticians that 'communities are built around feelings and that their feelings must be considered as part of archival relations.'<sup>72</sup> Placing these differing expressions of women's experience of work during the First World War side by side promotes probing questions of context and given circumstances.

The coverage of the experience of women workers on Tyneside during this period in recent exhibitions at the Discovery Museum also fails to address the question of what happened to these women at the end of the war. An unquestioning version of the local narrative about Tyneside's women munitions workers pervades the contemporary experience even with the implied evidence of these photographs and historical evidence from outside of the region. For example, it can be seen expressed in the following excerpt from press materials on the museum's website concerning their pop-up exhibition in 2015 about women's changing roles during World War One entitled 'Wor Life':

The role of women during the war from munitionettes to footballers is also explored in the exhibition. Thousands of young women took up positions at factories across Tyneside, including Armstrong's vast armaments factories in the West End of Newcastle making shells and guns that would be sent to the front line. Women also worked on the buses, trams and railways as well as the land by 1918.'<sup>73</sup>

Acknowledgement of potentially tumultuous events for these women at the end of the war is omitted. Neither is the women's contribution foregrounded anywhere in the holdings of the Discovery Museum. The extant traces available lack coherence and their

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<sup>71</sup> Cifor, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> <https://twmuseums.org.uk/wor-life/about-wor-life>



dissonant echoes are at best muffled and at worst silent. I had to consider whether a lack of evidence for their protest despite Woollacott's research was perhaps because women munition workers on Tyneside did not feel the need to protest, or that they did not feel empowered to do so. Or, had evidence for their protest escaped archival interest, having been subject to a process of archiving located in a 'traditional appraisal [...] grounded purely in historical or research value [which] would likely have discarded such records'.<sup>74</sup> I began to suspect that prior to the undertaking of my research efforts, there had been no interest in the experiences and subsequent fate of the female munitions workers on Tyneside during and after the First World War.

The Discovery had yielded some statistics and photographs, but I felt sure there was more to be found in the mountains of material held on the kilometres of archival shelving. However, further searches in the catalogues revealed little else. I returned to *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, the collection of essays in which I had first encountered Knox's observations about working-class women within the cultural mythology of Tyneside and their often-misrepresented place in the economic picture of the area and the foundational resource for my creation of Molly. In the bibliography of Knox's essay I found a reference to 'Tyne and Wear Archive Services', a former imprint of the current Tyne & Wear holdings.<sup>75</sup> However, I could not find any material relating to it in the catalogues at the Discovery Museum or in their digital listings. Stumped, I turned to *eBay*, the consumer to consumer and business to consumer internet sales site where many second-hand and antiquarian booksellers operate. I considered a search here worth trying because as Eichhorn asserts such deregulated sites may be an important archival resource for a fractured feminist version of our history. She states that 'many of the coveted collections of women's papers that now exist in university archives are only there because community activists made a conscious decision to become archivists long before most institutionally sanctioned collections recognized women's history as important or legitimate'.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, I entered the terms 'First World War', 'female munitions workers' and 'Tyne and Wear' into *eBay*'s search engine. This produced a Tyne & Wear archives sources brochure from 1988 entitled 'Wor Lass', archives, as

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<sup>74</sup> Cifor, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> Knox, p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> Kate Eichhorn, 'D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production Since 1990', *Women's Studies*, 2010, 39(6), 622 – 646, (p. 625).



described, now housed at the Discovery Museum.<sup>77</sup> A section is reproduced from an article written by Lady Katherine Parsons for the journal 'The Shipbuilder' in 1919 and entitled 'Women's Work in Shipbuilding and Engineering during the War'. The article details the nature and complexity of the women's work and is a call for fair treatment of the, by then, redundant but highly-skilled women. The sources brochure contains an alternate reading of the accepted local status-quo of the time. Lady Parsons details the women's work thus:

They could mill all the parts of the breech mechanism of howitzers, screwing the internal thread for the breech block, milling the interrupted screw, and screwing the cone that fits into the breech block; milling firing pins and all the parts of the gun sights; in each case setting up their own work. In a firm repairing guns two girls dealt with guns varying from the 13-in. naval gun, weighing 50 tons, to the 6-lb tank gun. They could design repairs to guns and mechanism, and calculate the factor of safety of a damaged gun by logarithm and slide rule.<sup>78</sup>

Here was the first direct testimony I had encountered regarding the position of women employed in munitions, describing how the women designed, calculated and milled their own work in a series of complex operations. The text illuminated the conditions of the local situation and provided invaluable detail regarding the work my character Molly would have been engaged in. Lady Parsons' testimony shed light on statements I had found in *The Woman's Part, A Record of Munitions Work*, published New York in 1918. In this record of women's munitions work in Great Britain the author makes this observation: 'An understanding has arisen between the machine and the operator which amounts almost to affection. I have noticed the expression of this emotion in the workshops; the caressing touch of a woman's fingers [...] which cannot be taught, or imparted, enables the operation to be started in the most effective method possible'.<sup>79</sup> As detailed in the sources brochure of 1988, Lady Parsons' article avoids this

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<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting here, the repetition of the use of 'Wor' – a Geordie idiom for 'ours'; and its usage by effectively the same institution in their 2015 exhibition but separated by some thirty years and without reference to the alternate information contained in the brochure. The word remains the same, but the engagement with content differs.

<sup>78</sup> Lady Katherine Parsons, *Wor Lass: Women's Work in Shipbuilding and Engineering during the War*. (Tyne and Wear: Tyne and Wear Archives Service, 1988), p 71.

<sup>79</sup> L.K. Yates, *The Woman's Part, A Record of Munitions Work*, (New York: George H Doran, 1918, reprint: www.rarebooksclub, 2015), p 8.

romanticised tone presumably because it was originally given as an address at an Engineering and Shipbuilders Institute Victory Dinner in 1918, and her purposes were to highlight what she considered to be a betrayal of the women's employment prospects. It was subsequently published in *The Shipbuilder* magazine in January 1919, the bound collections of which are held at Newcastle University and at the Imperial War Museum.<sup>80</sup> In the address Lady Parsons emphatically states that: 'The women who worked so hard to win the freedom of the world may not have freedom at home to engage in an industry where the wages are promising. [...] to have their economic independence and freedom to make their way without any artificial restrictions.'<sup>81</sup> According to Lady Parsons, these relatively uneducated women progressed through the acquisition of key engineering skills. As attested to by her this training had previously taken years of apprenticeship. Through the enlightened training efforts provided by Lady Parsons, who was herself an engineer, serviced a government desperate for munitions. It became apparent that: 'a short intensive training will turn out a sufficiency of useful workers, and that an intelligent girl can learn almost any mechanical process in a few weeks, a prolonged apprenticeship not being necessary.'<sup>82</sup> However, 'The Munitions Act of 1915' explicitly stated that the process of 'dilution' would end at the termination of war. One must assume that none of these women had read the small print of the Act, if we are to believe Lady Parsons when she states:

Great hopes were entertained by many women that a new profession was open to them, where they could earn good wages and where they would have some scope for their skill and intelligence. But with the signing of the Armistice all such pleasant hopes were destroyed, the training schools were closed to women, the trade unions reminded employers of the Government pledge to restore trade union rules, and within a few weeks the demobilization of women dilutees was general.<sup>83</sup>

Her statements are direct and do not require any manner of creative interpretation. Lady Parsons states that the women anticipated their work continuing and their 'hopes

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1506005021>

<sup>81</sup> Parsons, p. 72.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

were destroyed' when it was not.<sup>84</sup> However, no action was taken in response to her pleas on the women's behalf, and there appeared to be no local evidence for any kind of protest mounted by the women, unlike their London counterparts. Woollacott, however, does detail the plight of these unemployed Tyneside women: 'In Newcastle, by 20 December [1918] there were fifteen thousand women unemployed, most of whom were dismissed munitions workers and it was expected that more would be unemployed by Christmas.'<sup>85</sup> This situation was compounded by the government's move to reduce the women's unemployment benefit to 15 shillings as most of them had been out of work for more than thirteen weeks. There were twenty shillings to a pound in 1919.<sup>86</sup> Tyneside, unlike in London and the South-East, was a region with limited employment opportunities for women so this return to merely surviving in a post-Armistice environment perhaps sapped any energy for potential dissent and protest. Lady Parsons' testimony brought me closer to an understanding of the silenced dissent glimpsed in marginalised documented archival facts and figures. Knox's notion of Tyneside's 'cultural mythology' and Steedman's archival silences and absences brought into focus the trace of a forgotten moment, foregrounding a disobedient fugitive: Molly, alienated from the accepted status quo, secretly wishing, in Lady Parsons' words, to 'make [her] own way without any artificial restrictions'.<sup>87</sup> From a feminist perspective, this is a key moment in local women's history. Lady Parsons' statements are a matter of record and, unlike much of women's historical presence, they are not composed of contentious anecdote or derived from Steedman's enforced narration. Yet the local archive does not privilege the information they contain. Why? Was this absence of nuance a signifier of an operation of 'cruel optimism', discouraging the pursuance of 'alternative, more just social and economic arrangements [in] the form of small acts of imagining'?<sup>88</sup> Small acts of imagining which may have difficulty finding a permanent place in a monetized archive.

Lady Parsons' article argues with the accepted view of events as expressed in the materials available at the Discovery Museum whether in their 2015 pop-up exhibition,

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>85</sup> Woollacott, pp. 107 – 108.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Mortimer-Lee and Helen Macfarlane, *Inflation over 300 years*, London: Bank of England, 1994, 156 – 162, (p.156).

<sup>87</sup> Parsons, p. 73.

<sup>88</sup> Cifor, p. 25.

or in any investigation of the context of the photographs of the women workers, or the uncontested and relatively inaccurate statistics. There is little archival expression of a dissenting voice demonstrated by the public-facing collections and materials available at the Discovery Museum. This absence may speak to a retreat from a previous archival activism based in the community as expressed in the 1980's sources brochure, from which Lady Parsons address comes, to a more corporate rendering of the archival experience in which 'official narratives rarely highlight community perspectives'.<sup>89</sup> Given Tyneside's prominence as a nexus of industrial and engineering development, and the Discovery Museum's co-operative/community antecedents both architecturally and organisationally, it would seem unfortunate that Lady Parsons' recorded statements go unremarked in the contemporary archive. This erasure of a documented address given by a prominent public figure invites one to consider whether the constant repositioning of the archive away from community efforts to the panopticon described by Burton in today's competitive heritage market is an exponential process of commodification. Baillie, Chatzoglou and Taha assert that this process 'enhances the level of selectivity and can distort the past rendering it uncritical, untrue, bland, boring, and wholly without the ability to shock or scandalize'.<sup>90</sup> With so much 'stuff', constant funding applications to author to justify the archive's existence, and new directives to fulfil, details which impinge too deeply into the accepted narrational status-quo may not be welcome. Despite re-interpolation efforts by community and women's groups, significant absences persist.

As part of its 'experience' the museum has a public duty to reflect up-to-date social movements, yet because of funding prerogatives led by prevailing public interests, this is an awareness which has moved away from a singularly female-led struggle against oppressive forces. Wallace claims that 'archivists should focus on unpacking and examining their diversity—along the continua of public/private, institutional/collecting, resource rich/under-resourced, and alternative mission statements'.<sup>91</sup> This appeal to a nuanced diversity is laudable but does not account for the current silences and absences regarding female economic contribution in the consciousness of the local archive. It does not account for the prevailing 'cultural mythology' which has not re-ascribed or

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<sup>89</sup> Caswell & Punzalan, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Britt Baillie, Afroditi Chatzoglou and Shadia Taha, 'Packaging the Past', *Heritage Management*, 3(1), 2010, 51 – 71, (p. 56).

<sup>91</sup> David A Wallace, 'Locating Agency Interdisciplinarity Perspectives on Professional Ethics and Archive Morality', *Journal of Information Ethics*, 19(1), 2010, 172 – 189, (pp. 175-176).

interpolated the altered narrative as it was examined in the 1980's into the story the local archive chooses to tell now. Research undertaken then has not retained its significance for the narrative that was presented during the period of my research, it has been re-submerged in changing funding streams and cultural shifts, washed up in backwaters only revealed by surfing the net.

Despite the original co-operative aims and values embedded in its brickwork the Discovery Museum, like many other public and portfolio-funded organisations, is constrained by the checks and balances required of a primary pressure to secure revenue. To ensure survival in an austere market the museum, as already mentioned, has necessarily repositioned itself as a 'fun', 'family-friendly' venue for weddings, conferences and other events, rather than a repository of affective impact which may resonate with unpalatable truths. The stories told publicly largely uphold a pre-established consensus about the area's industrial pride. In the hard-nosed funding marketplace, complex and awkward elements are difficult to sell within a resolved story that states: 'we fought hard but survived to tell the tale'. Since the 1980's government bodies have pursued an expedient accommodation between the archive, culture and the 'people'. Certain groups and their perhaps painful experiences, their 'cultural imprimatur' fall out of favour and may not effectively serve the prevailing masculinized local archival narrative that is prioritised.<sup>92</sup> Or the representation is slanted towards the positive, as Tosh asserts: 'when the past is conserved or re-enacted for our entertainment, it is usually (though not invariably) presented in its most attractive light'.<sup>93</sup> To cast a less than attractive, but rather more illuminating light on their disregarded subjects, funded scholars and practitioners are granted time to wrestle with the fugitive presence of the unremarked, which helps to disseminate some of the archive's sequestered contents on the page, at conferences and events. But the forgotten fail to emerge into a more permanent though according to Brewer, 'necessarily incomplete' affective presence in the local archive.<sup>94</sup> To allow the presence of more awkward elements of experience may discomfort the notion of the archive as a nostalgic refuge and disallow the positioning the archive as a witness which is 'deeply implicated

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<sup>92</sup> De Groot, p. 241.

<sup>93</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd 2010), p 17.

<sup>94</sup> John Brewer, 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History the Journal of the Social History Society*, 7(1), 2010, 87-109, (p 102).

in webs of affective relations.’<sup>95</sup> The archive serving as witness comes freighted with difficult responsibilities: whose pain to prioritise?

Ahmed states that asking for another to witness our pain grants it the status of ‘an event, a happening in the world, rather than just something, something felt internally by anyone’.<sup>96</sup> It is a far less complicated operation for the archive as a conceptual theorization to ponder notions of being responsible to all and striving for diverse affect, than it is for a building, an organisation, or a something which strives to contain everything. The archive risks revealing itself to be an imperfect and flawed container, rather than Derrida’s all-powerful *archon*. Theory disrupts the narrative of museums as sites ‘of commercial interaction and celebration, franchises hired by companies to add gravitas to their events’.<sup>97</sup> Just enough gravitas, but not too much; too much might limit the purchasable cultural capital of the museum as a celebratory venue. Cifor asks us to regard the records and documents therein as storehouses of sensibilities, rather than inert, inchoate stuff, and to work against the grain of commodification, to work towards a ‘valuing of affect’ in the archive.<sup>98</sup> The feeling in the documents, photographs and snippets of information in the Discovery Museum regarding the munition’s women are mutable and awkward. Their presence provokes problematic questions for the optimistic archive. The women did not rise in justified anger, like their male forefathers and contemporaries, spurred on to direct action. Is the witness to their plight effaced because theirs is an untidy and unresolved story, and why has Lady Parsons, who spoke for them, been largely forgotten? She has been silenced in the archival discussion, apparently not deemed to be worthy of appraisal or of any ‘archival value’.<sup>99</sup> I needed to further investigate the reasons for this absence.

With a deeper sense of what is or what is not considered to be of archival value, I returned to the museum in the manner of a stealthy archival detective re-examining previously overlooked areas for signs and clues. Roaming the levels, I found, in a tucked-away corner, relegated to a footnote on a touch screen in an infrequently visited display on the first floor, a tiny reference to Lady Parsons. The display mentions that Lady Parsons taught Charles Parsons embroidery, and that she and her daughter Rachel were

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<sup>95</sup> Cifor, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp 29-30.

<sup>97</sup> De Groot, p. 241.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>99</sup> Cifor, p. 9.

engineers, but no more than that. This display is an indicator, as Sangster tells us, of a process of 'marginalising and trivialising women's historical voices and their experiences'.<sup>100</sup> In an equally over-looked corner of the building, in the Joicey collection, was something minor, but significant. This collection was bequeathed to the Newcastle City authorities in 1919 and transferred and housed in the Discovery Museum in 1994. It belongs to a much earlier and now out-dated museum-experience, but I found it to have a deeper engagement with working class women's history and experience than currently on display during my visits.


This collection depicts a journey through the history of ordinary life on Tyneside and its end date is 1987. As the original Tyne & Wear Lady Parsons archives source I uncovered is dated 1988, this speaks again to an iteration of the museum and its collections in light of 1980's feminism and community activism. It is an example of Caswell's view that the alternate narrative available in subsequently diminished community archives 'reflect an attention to cultural difference that many mainstream repositories have historically ignored'.<sup>101</sup> Towards the end of the Joicey permanent exhibit there is a poster display dedicated to 1919 which reads: 'Marriage or Munitions [...] At the end of the war women are 'discharged' from their wartime work. However, many do not want to leave their new well-paid jobs'. A short contemporary testimony is provided by an employment agency of the time in which women are refusing to go back to their only former employment opportunities as domestic servants. The employment agency staff-member speaks of the women's expressions of resentment, as can be seen in the following photograph of the Joicey Collection exhibit.

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<sup>100</sup> Joan Sangster, 1994, 'Telling our stories: feminist debates and the uses of oral history', *Women's History Review*, 3(1), 5-28, (p 23).


<sup>101</sup> Michelle Caswell, 'Towards a survivor-centred approach to records documenting human rights abuse: lessons from community archives', *Archival Science*, 2014 14(3-4), 308-322 (p 313).

# MARRIAGE OR MUNITIONS?




**Women Workers at Maling's pottery, Byker, 1920**  
If women need to go out to work to boost the family income, the choice of jobs is limited. Domestic service is the most common employment. There are only a few industrial firms which recruit women, among them Maling's pottery.

**Before the First World War most women do not go out to work. The expected 'career' for women is to marry, have babies and spend their lives cooking and cleaning for their families.**




**Above: A team of munitions workers at the Elswick Works**  
This team, photographed in 1914, includes three sisters – Frances (left), Alice (centre back) and Minnie (right). All live in Elswick and none has worked in industry before. As one writer in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* says, "England's need has been women's opportunity".




**Left: 'Munitions Girls' at the Elswick Works**  
As men are called up to the Front, so women are recruited to take their places in factories. The Elswick Works takes on many women to make munitions (guns and ammunition).

**The First World War enables women to try some new occupations.**



**Below: A Newcastle postwoman during the First World War**

**At the end of the War women are 'discharged' from their wartime work. However, many do not want to leave their new, well-paid jobs.**



Women are reluctant to return to the traditional women's occupation – domestic service. Not only is it poorly paid, it is also very hard work.

"Maids have complained that to get out of the drudgery of it all they have married the first man who asked them".

*Manager of a domestic service agency, 1919*

**Fig 1.3 Discovery Museum, Joicey Collection (author's own photograph)**



This display-board rendering of evidence was considered relevant to the munitions story on Tyneside in the 1980's and reinforces Lady Parsons' defence of the women in munitions and engineering, and her forceful narration, her plea for the women against their abandonment by the factories and the government of the day. The corroborating evidence from this expression of women's economic contribution again locates the interests of the archival authorities of the time within the influence of second wave feminism and community activism. The witness of these now discarded interests expressed by the Joicey Collection reflect Eichhorn's statements about the necessity to trawl obscure sources collected and compiled by community activists some forty decades ago in order to resurface lost archival evidence regarding the role and character of women in the industrial life of the region.

In my conversations with the volunteers and curators at the Discovery Museum none had come across the renegade address by Lady Parsons, even though the testimony once had a presence there. No mention was made in the museum's own pop-up exhibition of these women's attitude to their work, summary dismissal and return to often devastated family situations at the end of the war, although the scant evidence that is available is sitting on a poster in the museum's public collection and implicit on a smart screen in a dusty corner. It seemed necessary for me to try to further my understanding, 'to grasp traces of voices, affects and experiences of those denied by power that would otherwise be lost to the archival record', and to continue to question why the experience and knowledge of Lady Parsons and the women she spoke for should not have a dedicated space in a building which celebrates the industrial achievements of Tyneside and its people.<sup>102</sup> Men's stories still outnumber women's in new multi-partnered exhibitions at the museum. Must we assume that archivists and authorities are consciously or unconsciously 'implicated in complex power relations to witness and [...] the difficult work of negotiating collective narratives of pain, past and present, in the archives and far beyond it'.<sup>103</sup> There are snippets of women's stories throughout the museum's other displays, mostly representations of women's physical presence. In film footage about the history of the Tyne and the Geordie character, women's gleeful faces smile with Kodachrome saturation, wielding pickaxe and lathe in the shipyards of the Second World War, when their services were once again called

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<sup>102</sup> Caswell, p. 18.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

upon. Both former expressions of female inequality and consequent activism concerning it are forgotten and unremarked now in the museum's inclusive 'experience'.

The Discovery Museum's stated mission in its corporate plan is 'to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others.'<sup>104</sup> Who are the people whose place in the world must be thus enabled? As cited by Holmes, in the UK over the past two decades male volunteers have outnumbered their female counterparts in the heritage industry. She cites that industrial museums, of which the Discovery serves as a prime example, 'are more likely to attract male rather than female volunteers.'<sup>105</sup> According to Holmes, there is a top-down management structure operating in the heritage industry, whereby males sit at the top of the pyramid and male volunteers manage the interactions on the shop-floor. Her research goes some way to explain the absence of women's stories at the forefront of a museum's concerns. If the archive's actors are predominantly male, then what Eichhorn terms its 'marketable products' must also be male-orientated.<sup>106</sup> Charles Parsons' sleek and modernist, state-of-the-art *Turbinia* could just as well have been designed and built by women-workers if we take on board Lady Parsons' testimony to their quickly acquired engineering and manufacturing skills, but the prevailing 'cultural mythology' on Tyneside as described by Knox is kept in its place at the Discovery Museum, symbolised by Lord Parsons' immobilised and silent vessel and the stories it cannot tell. Any evidence to the contrary requires a stealthy navigation of this gendered environment.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://twmuseums.org.uk/corporate-publications-and-policies/corporate-plan>

<sup>105</sup> Kirsten Holmes, 'Volunteers in the heritage sector: a neglected audience?' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 9(4), 2003, 341-355, (p 343).

<sup>106</sup> Eichhorn, p. 638.



## Chapter 2. Woodhorn Colliery & Museum

The supposed link between heritage and decline ignored the ways in which the 'heritage industry' had democratised (or at least contributed to the democratisation of) the past, and how conservation served as a metaphor and principle of growth in contemporary economies – even when this was through the appeal to nostalgic sentiment.<sup>107</sup>

Gentry 'The Pathos of Conservation'

Woodhorn Colliery & Museum on the coast of Northumberland lies twenty-three miles east of the Discovery Museum and houses the Northumberland Archives. Until 1981 this was a working mine. Situated between the town of Ashington and the beginning of the Northumberland Coastal Path at Cresswell, just north of Newbiggin and Lynemouth, this was once a prosperous area. Coal facilitated a thriving community. Woodhorn Colliery generated up to 600,000 tons of coal per year and the pit was worked by 2,000 men.<sup>108</sup> However, with the closure of the pits in the 1980s, the area suffered and continues to suffer considerable deprivation.<sup>109</sup> The productive coal seams worked at nearby Ellington-Lynemouth Colliery and at Woodhorn ran from beneath the North Sea and extended under Druridge Bay, which is now a country park. Due to its proximity to the Northumberland Coastal Route, government investment facilitated the location's reinvention as a tourist and recreation destination. However, the area is once again under threat from the fossil-fuel industry with nearby Druridge Bay and its seven miles of award-winning nature reserve being subject to open-cast mining bids.<sup>110</sup> As evidenced by a well-supported public campaign against the proposal there are those in

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<sup>107</sup> Kynan Gentry, 'The Pathos of Conservation': Raphael Samuel and the politics of heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21(6), 2015, 571-576, (p 569).

<sup>108</sup> [www.experiencewoodhorn.com](http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com).

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/Document%20library/Northumberland-IMD-2010-Ward-Summary.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-15-eu-laws-we-will-miss-in-britain-a7103031.html>: '[...] **Renewables directive**: Technically known as Directive 2009/28/EC, this is reckoned by the Open Europe think-tank to be the single most expensive piece of Brussels-imposed legislation. Steered through the Commons by Ed Miliband, when he was Energy Secretary, it sets targets for combatting climate change, such as achieving a 20 per cent share of energy from renewable sources by 2020, at a reputed cost of £4.7bn a year. Brexit campaigners tend to be sceptical about climate change, so a government dominated by Brexiteers may well see this as a useful way to save money. Green activists will disagree.'

the area and beyond who do not want to allow King Coal back onto his noisome throne.<sup>111</sup>

The ex-colliery of Woodhorn is surrounded by woods which are home to a resurgent red squirrel population. The reclaimed land is often blanketed by sea-fret, but occasional shafts of sunlight pierce the mist and illuminate the edges of the site's smartly refurbished pit-head and workings constructed from the local nicotine-yellow Ashington brick. Grandiose metal blades fan out from the top of the Cutter Building which houses the museum and its archive. The design of the building immortalises the giant coal-cutters once employed underground. The blades of monster-machines would rotate at high speed cutting into the premium-quality coal seam. The shape of these blades bisecting the mist echo the seagull feathers which litter the now rehabilitated countryside. Ephemeral as these feathers are, they are sculpturally reflected in the design of the contemporary museum building, representing both a solidity and a transience I was to further consider as I worked on 'surfacing distinctive affective experiences' in the purpose of the small marks and signs I examined in a series of letters which expressed an alternate and fugitive exception to the official record.<sup>112</sup>

The context in which Woodhorn Colliery and Museum is situated is overwhelmingly that of the coal industry. The building and its environs sit on a bedrock of coal, and its archival contents are dominated by coal and its products. However, this context may exclude other archival expressions which add meaning and nuance to the narrative of the coal industry. MacNeil suggests that a notion of framing rather than context may be more useful in understanding archival authorities' influence on what is included and excluded from the materials that the public engage with. She states that: 'however much archivists try to include within the frame, something will always remain outside of it; and second, [...] the decisions they make about what to include and exclude are, inevitably, ideological'.<sup>113</sup> Considered thus, Woodhorn is framed between opposing forces within the coal industry: an archival pressure which seeks to memorialise and an external pressure which seeks to reinstate the profits from the industry. This conflict of

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<sup>111</sup> <http://www.savedruridge.co.uk>

<sup>112</sup> Cifor, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> Heather MacNeil, 'Trust and professional identity: narratives, counter narratives and lingering ambiguities.' *Archival Science*, Volume 11, 2011, 176-192, (p. 190).

ideological interest is reflected in the archival operations and expressions without and within the museum and archive.

According to Woodhorn's website the archive held there is comprised of:

in excess of four linear miles of records. We also hold in the region of 8,000 3-D objects and the Local Studies Reference and Master Collections that were previously held at Morpeth Library. All of our holdings are kept in secure environmentally controlled strong rooms to ensure their long term preservation.<sup>114</sup>

Industrial achievements of the past are celebrated in the exhibits and displays inside Woodhorn, but framed by coal Woodhorn's extensive archive, visitor centre and museum overwhelmingly celebrate and memorialises the past glories and concomitant miseries of that industry. For example, the 'Coal Experience' exhibition depicts in text, objects and photographs the heyday of the industry through the experience of a thirteen-year old boy's first day of work in the pit. Subsequently, with coal's decline, the exhibition takes us into the village and the home. Dominated by domestic images and artefacts, these latter expressions, once again reconfirm Knox's notion of a cultural mythology whereby 'a regional economy dependent on heavy industries and employing mainly male labour went hand in hand with an enthusiastic consensus adoption and approval of the Victorian domestic model – the man as breadwinner, and the woman as wife and mother'.<sup>115</sup> However, this sub-text of the rightful place for women being in the home as required by the exigencies of heavy-industry and a necessarily compliant domestic workforce is partially challenged by the 'Coal Experience'.

Towards the end of its timeline the exhibition focuses on the changes in gender roles brought about by the 1984 -85 miners' strike. During this time women took on an active role in the organisation of the strike whilst also maintaining their usual domestic duties and extending these into a cooperative effort for the benefit of the hard-pressed community. On closer analysis the story of the women's so-called 'liberation' within the purview of Woodhorn's 'Coal Experience' appears to be limited and neatened-up for public consumption and framed by an ideology of expedient rather than ongoing activism. As Cifor states, archival appraisals may: 'serve[s] to obscure and further

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<sup>114</sup> <http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com/about-us-1/>

<sup>115</sup> Knox, p. 93.

unequal power relations.’<sup>116</sup> This can be seen expressed through Woodhorn’s ‘Coal Experience’ exhibition because the traces of the mining women’s activism appear to have begun and ended in 1985. Contrary to this populist iteration Spence and Stephenson claim that despite the prevailing narrative of miner’s wives embracing activism and then retreating back into domesticity, ‘many women were politically active and aware prior to the dispute though not necessarily in a traditional sense. Women’s activism is characterised by continuity: those women who have maintained activism were likely to have been socially and/or politically active prior to the dispute.’<sup>117</sup> The simplification of the women’s political activism in the Woodhorn exhibition further speaks to an ongoing obfuscation of women’s contribution to the picture of political and economic struggle in the region.

The narrative of nostalgic resistance presented at Woodhorn, highlighting women’s singular rather than ongoing contribution in these former industrial communities also denies the deindustrialised realities of today. In the age of the so-called precariat more and more women have entered the workplace, with some evidence for a majority employment of women working in call-centres and jobs associated with new technologies.<sup>118</sup> Even the rise of the zero-hours contract may favour mothers, particularly single mothers with young children over their male counterparts – a situation which calls to mind employment patterns during the First World War.<sup>119</sup> The archive here makes no comparison between these experiences – it provides no context of current activism and struggle beyond its walls, no ‘concrete prospects for advocating and supporting social justice.’<sup>120</sup> Perhaps this is because of, ‘modernist notions of archival science and neutrality’ consequently the archive must not engage in current party or community politics.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, in the ‘Coal Experience’ exhibition at Woodhorn there is a disconnect between what the archive chooses to present as women’s experience and how women have experienced and continue to experience their world. In the politics of research masculinized impartiality is valued and

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<sup>116</sup> Cifor, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Spence and Carol Stephenson, ‘Female Involvement in the Miners’ Strike 1984-1985: Trajectories of Activism’, *Sociological Research Online*, 2007 12(1), (pp. 1-11).

<sup>118</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160108012507/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_328352.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160108012507/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_328352.pdf)

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.safeworkers.co.uk/zero-hours-contracts-explained.html>

<sup>120</sup> Wallace, p. 175.

<sup>121</sup> Cifor, p. 11.

engagement which is subjective and mutable, characterized towards the feminine, is under-valued in a 'gendered notion [...] of knowledge production.'<sup>122</sup> The new world order is exempted and the cultural mythological tropes of men = work, women = home are maintained. This speaks to a wholesale archival memory-fail which segregates women's contribution to an anomaly which does not bear repetition. There is a comparison to be made between the archival erasure of a nuanced expression of the situation for working women in 1918 and, to some extent, their modern counterparts.

The truncated evidence of women's involvement in the Miners' Strike of 1984 – 85 on display in Woodhorn's exhibition signals the resulting gender shift in work practices that came with deindustrialization. The choice of offering only a fleeting glimpse of female activism speaks to a notion that a more nuanced rendering may subvert the prioritising of the accepted narrative of male-dominated struggle and sacrifice and a continued devaluing of female affect. Samuel's notion of the 'pathos of conservation' understands the archive as privileging the memorialisation of suffering in place of present activism.<sup>123</sup> To include iteration of ongoing struggles and reconfigured inequalities would render the archive's primary function - to celebrate past economic and social victories - defunct. The past is presented as having been 'solved' by present circumstances, by progress which precludes engagement with the traumas and tragedies of the past. At play is what Cifor describes as the 'marginalized affect in archival discourse' whereby the role of the emotional life, the given circumstances in awkward elements of the archive are denied presence in the *archon*, in order to avoid the risk of the local archive functioning as a deeply painful reminder of a presence and agency which is no longer available to its consumers.<sup>124</sup>

Thorleifsson, in the abstract to her 2016 examination of UKIP's rise to prominence in the ex-coal mining communities of Doncaster, attributes this denial to an 'existential insecurity'.<sup>125</sup> She describes a dispiriting post-industrial environment in which there is little meaningful work for the remaindered men of the collieries and their descendants. The ex-workers have lost all contact with a world of work that was once secure and life-long. Thorleifsson asserts that in its apparent bid for democratization the

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<sup>122</sup> Cifor, p. 12.

<sup>123</sup> Gentry, p. 561.

<sup>124</sup> Cifor, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> Cathrine Thorleifsson, 'From Coal to Ukip: the struggle over identity in post-industrial Doncaster', *History and Anthropology*, 27(5), 2016, 555 -568, (pp. 556).



heritage industry may facilitate a disavowal of present economic realities. She posits a position whereby these ex-industrial communities have a real-world perception of being once again in social and economic jeopardy, just as the miners were in 1984 - 85. The constant epiphanies from the local archive of a glorious and proud industrial past which is presented to the community may serve to disempower and encourage a move towards an entrenched position. On the one hand is the glory of our industrial past and all its heroic mythological values and on the other a painful reminder of all that has been dismantled. However, that glorious land of full-time respectable employment and well-defined gender-roles may never have existed, is it a construct forged by necessity – a sentimentalised sanctuary?

Woodhorn sits within the Northumberland voting wards which voted for Brexit by 55% with a turn-out of over 73%.<sup>126</sup> In this context, the world by which Woodhorn is framed is one in which the Other, including working-class women, are economic competitors for scarce resources. Women are at generally lower rates of pay, because despite legislation enacted by the UK parliament, including the implementing of European Laws safeguarding equal representation, therefore a substantial gender pay gap still exists.<sup>127</sup> Women have taken the jobs and unwittingly under-cut their male counterparts. The muted female presence in the archival expressions that the museum chooses to highlight may serve to under-pin a nostalgic refuge of more prosperous times and conservative values. However, as Knox asserts, in working-class communities, women have always sought employment, even in the heavily industrialised areas of coal, ship-building and steel. Women have 'been able to slip between the economic and domestic boundaries and have long been adept at juggling cultural and social dictates with economic reality.'<sup>128</sup> This poses the question of why and how the local archive avoids these realities. The uncomfortable relationship between the heritage industry and the communities it targets as its audience is a complex process because, as Thorleifsson asserts: 'the industrial past is nostalgically remembered as an era signalling stability, as opposed to the uncertainty, socio-economic decline and hardship of the present.'<sup>129</sup> Therefore a discourse is discouraged with regard to the community's

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<sup>126</sup> <http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/local-news/northumberland-eu-referendum-results-your-11504510>

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/oct/26/uk-gender-pay-gap-narrows-to-lowest-for-20-years-but-is-still-91>

<sup>128</sup> Knox, p. 112.

<sup>129</sup> Thorleifsson, p. 562.

awkward relationship to industry, and the abdication of that industry's responsibilities, and the disempowerment of a white, male working-class workforce.

At Woodhorn, as with the Discovery Museum, the archival content is populated with the products and services of industrialized man. However, during my research visits to Woodhorn, women appeared to dominate, if not the exhibits, then in their public presence, the workforce. Anecdotal evidence from my observations while visiting the location is attested to by Arts Council England's research report in 2015 which presents a picture of archives and museums dominated by a female workforce, but rarely in positions of meaningful authority.<sup>130</sup> The output, governance and infrastructure of the heritage industry remains predominantly masculinized, as evidenced by Holmes' research already mentioned in Chapter One, in which industrial heritage sites' public-facing workforce are mostly dominated by male unpaid volunteers. Holmes' research makes the distinction between these locations and those such as stately homes owned by the English Heritage which have a larger female presence in the workforce. This disparity between domestic space and industrial space may account in some regard for the lack of female visibility in the exhibits of the collections at Woodhorn. However, Woodhorn bucks the national management trend by the recent appointment in 2017 of its new Chief Executive, Rowan Brown, as it does with the Head of Collections, Sue Wood, with whom I spent some time during my research visits.<sup>131</sup>

Wood is proud of the outreach aims of Woodhorn's archive collections and keen to forge relationships between the archive, scholars and creative practitioners. Although a feminizing of the archive is not her stated mission, one of Wood's aims is to foster a curiosity on behalf of the public in the unremarked elements of the archive, wherein a fugitive feminine presence is most likely to be found. Her approach is an example of what Caswell and Punzalan maintain should be best practice in an archive which ought to encompass: 'appraisal policies that bolster social inclusion and place archivists within the everchanging dynamics of community'.<sup>132</sup> Wood is an example of an archivist reaching out beyond an institution's official boundaries to give meaning to its partially catalogued but often unspecified contents. This additional work also adds value to that

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<sup>130</sup> Maureen Davies, Caitlin Griffiths and Helen Wilkinson, *Diversity in the Workforce and Governance of Art's Council England's Major Partner Museums: Research Project*, (Arts Council England 2015), pp. 1-43.

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/new-boss-announced-woodhorn-museum-12255652>

<sup>132</sup> Caswell and Punzalan, p. 8.

of the volunteers who are recruited to labour on Woodhorn's catalogue.<sup>133</sup> Volunteers, as seen at The Discovery Museum perform important duties public-facing duties with the museum complex of operations.

Woodhorn can be characterised as being somewhat more feminized in its work practices than that of the Discovery, but Spence and Stephenson attest to a notion that the story told within the museum 'experience' persists in a 'masculinist view'.<sup>134</sup> Despite evidence to the contrary from the personal testimony gathered for Spence and Stephenson's research regarding female activism during the 1984-85 Miner's Strike, the activism cited within Woodhorn's archival experience is typified as being exceptional rather than historical and ongoing. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra states in an interview that he is 'particularly interested in the role historiographical categories play in the organization of archives, both in the positive sense of what is kept and in the negative sense of what is what's not kept and silenced.'<sup>135</sup> Feminized stories are not only not told, archival categories do not exist that can hold their telling. Therefore, feminising work undertaken by academic researchers and individual archivists does not necessarily find its way into the body of the exhibits. The female presence in the archive is sanctioned by Derrida's *arkheion*, and as Steedman tells us, is always framed by what 'appears to represent the *now* of whatever kind of power is being exercised, anywhere, in any place or time.'<sup>136</sup> Despite scholarly or public-engagement activities to the contrary, archival research of this nature continues to remain orphaned in the stacks. To address these anomalies Caswell and Punzalan call for archival analysis positioned from a feminist perspective and for 'the creation of descriptive systems that allow for differential access based on historical and social context; the reconceptualization of outreach programs in response to legacies of inequity, mistrust, and colonialism; and greater attention to affect in all aspects of the archival endeavor'.<sup>137</sup> This requires a deeper examination of the obscure archival remnants that reaches for an understanding below the surface contents of an accepted appreciation of the materials' relationship to its value of

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<sup>133</sup> <http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com/working-lives-project/>

<sup>134</sup> Spence & Stephenson, p. 1.

<sup>135</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Categories as Archives: From Silence to Social Justice', *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, Vol 27, July 2018, p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> Steedman, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Caswell and Punzalan, p. 8.

historicity, and an acceptance that apparently disparate and anomalous elements may be part of a submerged pattern of alternative narrative.

Wood is keenly aware that, although Woodhorn provides a public service to those researching their family history – a service which forms an important element of the museum and archive’s ‘publicness’ – vast sections of the archive still lie forgotten and untouched. To this end, Wood speaks of these orphans of the stacks as having been ‘taken-in’. I was struck by her use of this technical phrase and its inherent ambiguity beyond the scope of archival practice. On the one hand, children may be taken-in or fostered-out, on the other hand, we may be taken-in because we are hoodwinked or deceived by something or someone’s apparent veracity. What is ‘taken-in’ and may ‘take us in’ in the archive is dependent on available space, time, resource, catalogue classification, the landscape in which it dwells, and the perception of its archival value. What is deemed to be of archival value is mutable and subject to patterns of institutional policy. Archival evaluation persists in a space which represents ‘the shifting relationship between archivists and users based on [...] registries of affect’, and the supposed relevance of any object, document or material to our current historical obsessions.<sup>138</sup> The archival organisation will petition to take-in elements deemed to add weight to the bricolage of social history in the service of their sanctioned duty to the public - De Groot’s cultural imprimatur.

One of the archive’s responsibilities, embodied by their mission statements, can be interpreted as being to those who, as Steedman tells us, Michelet regarded as ‘the proper subject of history; all the numberless unnoticed *miserabiles personae*, who had lived and died, as mute in the grave as they had been in life.’<sup>139</sup> The job of filing these numberless itinerants is endless. As each generation passes, more boxes are taken-in by the archive and added to the centuries of material already accumulated. The boxes of people’s stuff are often archivally anonymous, having been given no examination or description as to the specific character of their content and being exceptional the existing systems of cataloguing. There is so much stuff and not enough time or resources to do anything with it. Is the archive secretly in crisis unable to give voice to most of its contents? An endless stream of material is accumulating which even when catalogued

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<sup>138</sup> Caswell and Punzalan, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Steedman, p. 151.

and in the public domain may forever remain segregated in the stacks.<sup>140</sup> Creative and scholarly interventions with this limitless material may be one way of apparently clearing the backlog, but these interruptions are temporary and do not find a permanent expression in a museum's main output. By necessity the ever-expanding heritage industry survives by selling ourselves back to ourselves with an unquestioning and 'attractive light'.<sup>141</sup> Museum and archive visitors, external to interventional projects, are provided with a neatly packaged experience from which the awkward inconsistencies of those countless '*miserabiles personae*' are expunged.<sup>142</sup>

Some of these numberless were represented by a box of letters I was invited to examine at Woodhorn. The letters were to provide access to, as Cifor, as already discussed, allows for in encouraging affect in the archive, by engaging with 'small acts of imagining'.<sup>143</sup> The correspondence spoke to local experiences of the First World War and provided further insight into my continued research into the potentially disruptive character of working class women's presence in the period, represented in this instance by mothers and their children subsumed in the cultural mythology of Tyneside, unenforced voices which were, so far, proving to be as ephemeral as the seagull feathers fluttering about the re-purposed buildings of Woodhorn's coastal post-industrial landscape.

The collection of letters belonged to a Chester-le-Street family from County Durham but had found their way into the Northumberland Archive. The correspondence was between William Hall, a father, husband and uncle who served with the Durham Light Infantry in France during the First World War and was detained in Germany as a prisoner of war. The letters to him from his children and their cousin are sometimes written on lined paper possibly torn from school jotters, sometimes written on what appear to be brown paper-bags and all surprisingly robust considering their age. They detail in careful pencilled Copperplate the comings and goings on the family small-holding. The chasing of runaway pigs. The mistaken eating of the family's grandfather's precious seed potatoes: 'An awful thing happened last week. I took father's Great Scott's

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<sup>140</sup> <http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com/record-management/>

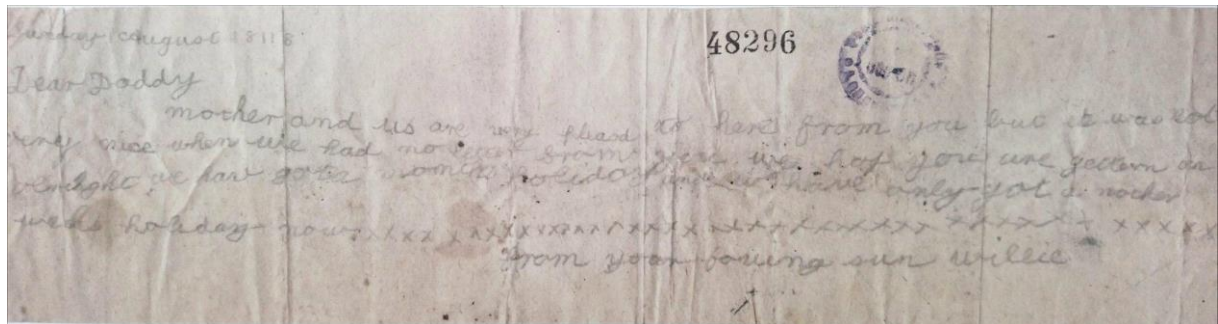
<sup>141</sup> Tosh, p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> Steedman, p. 151.

<sup>143</sup> Cifor, p. 25.

seed potatoes, and thought they were eating potatoes. Pa was fierce'.<sup>144</sup> The mistake gave the whole family belly-ache and robbed them of next year's crop.

The letters are sprinkled with kisses. Will's letters in reply, written on YMCA notepaper from the army camp at Catterick in August 1917, are equally effusive. The details in the letters from home give an insight into a domestic world affected by war. The carefully iterated kisses offered themselves up as a significant detail. Their affect direct and unalloyed, as seem in the following photographed image of one particular letter.



**Fig 1.4: Northumberland Archives: NRO 2332/4**

Dear Daddy,  
 Mother and us are very pleased to hear from you  
 but it was not very nice when we had no letter from you.  
 We hope you are getting on [...] xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
 From your loving son Willie <sup>145</sup>

The child's transient kisses written in pencil were possibly counted out as they were carefully marked on the paper, with the childish writing trying to stick to a straight line. Methodical in their avoidance of the margins, mistakes are made in the grammar and spelling of the words, but not in the kisses. Anonymous yet personal at the same time, the 'x' is an innocent or fervent proclamation of love and intent silent on the page: a possible sign of hope or capitulation. The 'x' is the simplest written mark: a promise of hidden treasure on a pirate's map, the potentially erasable mark on the ballot paper, the signifier of the illiterate, as Ginzburg asserts, an acknowledgment of an acquiescence to

<sup>144</sup> Northumberland Archives; Ref: NRO 2332/4, date 29/01/2014

<sup>145</sup> Northumberland Archives, ref: NRO2332/4 date: 29/01/2014.

officialdom by making a mark on legal documents.<sup>146</sup> It is an unadorned gesture freighted with potential readings.

Although numerous, the kisses and their potential for affect could be overlooked. Invisible to our more effusive and demonstrative age, the kisses on the letters could be taken for granted. Scribed kisses may not be an expression of affection we associate with a working-class stoicism belonging to the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet they question an accepted view of familial relationships which paints the working-class, and the lowly and rural poor, as being flinty in the face of adversity. This notion is highlighted by Knox's assertion of working-class women's traditional cultural currency: 'inadequate income and inadequate housing brought to the fore the qualities of self-sacrifice, forbearance, and self-denial that became the vital elements of women's respectability.'<sup>147</sup> This perception is reinforced by Jeremy Seabrook's assertion, quoted by Steedman in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, that stoicism was expressed in a 'domestic supremacy [which] was in part her consolation for her inability to express herself outside marriage and family.'<sup>148</sup> This concept of the consolations of domestic supremacy returns us to the images of women in the Woodhorn 'Coal Experience' exhibition standing proudly by their whitened front steps in their colliery villages, and their apparent return to this role in the aftermath of the Miners' Strike of 1984-85.

Traditionally women bring up the children and Steedman, reflecting on her own upbringing, examines the notion that:

in this sterner, older world the iron entered into the children's soul, and many of them had to learn that being alive ought simply to be enough, a gift that must ultimately be paid for. Under conditions of material poverty, the cost of most childhoods has been most precisely reckoned, and only life has been given freely.<sup>149</sup>

The world for the children of whom Steedman writes offered no respite or refuge in the carefree pleasures of youth, the only gift afforded them was being born and surviving as best they could. Steedman addresses herself to the culturally-embedded notion of a long-suffering respectable poor who do not show affection easily. The kisses question

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<sup>146</sup> Ginzburg, p. 119.

<sup>147</sup> Knox, p. 105.

<sup>148</sup> Steedman, p. 100.

<sup>149</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, (London: Virago, 1986), p 108.

this assumption and divining their meaning cannot be an exercise in reaching a definitive statement, but a transaction of memory. Nora states that: 'A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments-that is to say, the materials necessary for its work-but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de memoire*.'<sup>150</sup> The 'x's inscribed on the Chester-le-Street letters stand in here, for me, as a site of memory, a repository of affect, a place 'where memory crystallizes and secretes itself'.<sup>151</sup> This observation by Nora suggested for my purposes a sub-textual commentary on the subsequent bleak post-Armistice silence which Nicholson in *The Great Silence* delineates as being typified by 'restraint imposed by the rigours of war [...] a collective suppression of feeling'.<sup>152</sup> The kisses are a tiny silent, testimony to part of what was erased in the eerie post-war landscape: expressions of love from the undocumented and disregarded. The kisses drawn in pencil, sometimes the marks on the paper as light as a feather, could easily have faded from the page, but they have survived the intervening one hundred years: a fragile *aide-memoire* to a forgotten and personalised expression of familial love. The kisses offer an alternative version of history, just as the oral testimonies of the woman in Spence and Stephenson's research spoke of a persistent but hidden political activism. But, in terms of archival value, where does that get us? An aggregation of suppressed feelings which the working-class collectively and individually suffer would seem to be at work here. This notion of a consolation in numbness during and after the First World War is thrown into relief by the expressions of demonstrative love in the Chester-le-Street letters. In respect of the archival value of the kisses on the letters, they are too commonplace, too inconsequential to be worthy of the time, effort and public money required for an exhibition or even a supple enough catalogue classification of their own, so back in the box they must go.

Underneath the letters, at the bottom of the cardboard accession carton, was an obscure, but commonplace item, a further reminder of the unremarkable yet meaningful import of the ephemera of the archive. It was an opened envelope with the family's Chester-le-Street address on it. Lacking an accompanying letter, it was an object which could be easily discarded and overlooked. But the envelope contained a pressed leaf. Not

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<sup>150</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire' *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory*, (1989), 7-24. (p 9).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>152</sup> Juliet Nicolson, *The Great Silence* (London: John Murray, 2010), p. 9.



a rose or a flower of any description, but a sprig of ivy. This small abject offering had a distinct affect: able to elicit a range of emotions beyond the reach of the quotidian and extending 'concepts of who and what is of value'.<sup>153</sup> Possibly sent to Barbara Hall by William Hall, it had survived in its stray envelope, literally at the bottom of the pile.

The symbolic significance of ivy references a potent duality. Across the ages it's meaning has moved between an association with the Ancient Egyptian god Osiris and resurrection to Bacchanalian sexual abandon and chaos. It is a symbol of fortitude in the Welsh myth/poem 'The Battle of the Trees' and has a strong association with Robert Graves' White Goddess.<sup>154</sup> Ivy leaves figure on Grecian stelae and later Roman gravestones and early Christian graves in catacombs, in which the ivy leaf comes to symbolise eternal love, metamorphosing into a representation of the figure of Jesus Christ with his divine, unselfish heart.<sup>155</sup> Its associations are masculine and feminine, abject and elevated. With its fragile yet durable quality and associations, a sprig of ivy complicates assumptions about personal remembrance and war.

The ivy in its unremarkable acquisition carton had outlived the Chester-le-Street family. In this uncatalogued collection, no white gloves were required to handle the leaf again. It represented for me, what Steedman refers to as, the presence of the archive in its silences and absences.<sup>156</sup> This dried-up remnant was silent and was present, but what explanation for its presence could be offered? The easy assumption is that the ivy *obviously* represents an act of remembrance as similarly pressed flowers often do. It was contained in an envelope, so it probably had not just fallen into the box, but there was no accompanying note for it. There was the context of the accompanying letters which raised questions such as: did ivy have a special significance for the couple and why? Is ivy so commonplace that it has lost its mythic sexualized connotations, replaced by associations of Christian fidelity and love beyond the grave? Had there been a note to accompany it? Had the ivy been forgotten, ending up there by accident? Or had it been carefully placed in its otherwise empty envelope as a treasure-memory to be looked at and reminisced over? And by whom? The husband, the children or the wife of the

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<sup>153</sup> Cifor, p. 9.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1961).

<sup>155</sup> Grave stelae were often used for funerary or commemorative purposes. Stelae as slabs of stone would also be used as ancient Greek and Roman government notices or as boundary markers to mark borders or property lines.

<sup>156</sup> Steedman, p. 150.

Chester-le-Street family? The silent ivy constitutes a community object, a locus of social memory, denied a larger historical significance, but with an affect which cannot be discounted. The ivy and the questions provoked provide a conduit to an intimate resonance of lived experience and disrupts in its own small way, or at least calls into question, assumptions about forms of memory and their archival value.

Wallace advises in examining the role of archivists that an archive is meaningless unless it strives to position itself within a social justice paradigm, that it is 'imperative that archivists understand social memory as a locus of ongoing contestation, contradiction, and change *and examine the roles they play* in the politics of legitimizing and denying different forms of memory'.<sup>157</sup> Therefore only some kind of meaningful and enduring intervention can disrupt this process, an intervention with equivalences to practices of psychoanalysis. Steedman, paralleling Ginzburg's theorizations of unremarked histories, quotes from an essay in Juliet Mitchell's, *Women: The Longest Revolution: Essays in Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis*: 'the patient comes with the story of his or her life. The analyst listens; through an association something intrudes, disrupts, offers the anarchic carnival back into that history.'<sup>158</sup> The sprig of ivy and the kisses on the letters were disruptive and awkward and allowed me access to a private, distinctive and new presence in a largely homogeneous space. Its presence provided an understanding of Cifor's small imaginings in the archive.<sup>159</sup> Released from the archive's 'cruel optimism' and informed by associations beyond the purview of traditional archival practice the ivy acquired an unsettling presence.<sup>160</sup> But the ivy could find no home even in these centenary years and the current preoccupations of an archive engaged with First World War memory. So, it too went back in the box. It was an insignificant item of questionable provenance highlighting the orthodox archive's unachievable promise to take everything in and give it identity by the publicly-funded gifting of its time and effort.

As was seen with the Discovery Museum the gifting of time in the archive is framed and sanctioned by interests embodied by the public institutions' mission-statement which invariably include an element of outreach and education in order to

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<sup>157</sup> Wallace, p. 175.

<sup>158</sup> Steedman, 1986, p. 131.

<sup>159</sup> Cifor, p. 25.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

justify continued public-funding.<sup>161</sup> Thereby the archive continues to be catalogued into its already existing classifications and the more obscure contents sometimes disseminated, which attracts more public-funding and maintains the institution's profile as a public-facing and inter-disciplinary organisation. Engaging with partner institutions such as universities appears to multiply this value. As Morphey and Hartley state in their examination of the rhetorical tropes contained within mission statements in American public and private educational institutions, 'public colleges include mention of public service because, to ignore this element, might call into question their very "publicness."' <sup>162</sup> Here a further iteration of Milligan's examination of 'publicité' is revealed.<sup>163</sup> Institutional civic duty is prioritised and the stories told at the discretion of the archivists mediated through the wider concerns of the day as expressed by the institution's 'publicness'. But the undistinguished, their documents, and their personal testimonies, may provoke questions of the accepted narrative which the archival organisation does not have the time to address because of its perceived mission and specific locale. The institution's duty to the community is circumscribed by 'dominant normative political, economic and social structures through which power, privilege and oppression are enacted'.<sup>164</sup> Materials are 'taken-in' from the community and interventions are invited from the scholarly and creative community, but no guarantees or certainty can be given about their permanence within the museum's holdings. Pressures of funding, time and the ever-accumulating stuff must be given priority, despite the inclusive and apparently democratizing nature of the archive's mission-statements. This is an uncertainty which is not only underpinned by, in Woodhorn's case, the economic prospects of the area, but also reflected in the archive's ambivalent attitude to the representation of women in the industrial picture. Burton characterizes women's presence in the archive and their sanctioned archival value as being 'fragments of lives and dramas that we have only glimpses of [...] obscured by more large-scale

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<sup>161</sup> **'Woodhorn Charitable Trust Vision and Mission:** Woodhorn Charitable Trust exists to inspire, engage and connect people to Northumberland and its history by running a high-quality network of museums and archives across Northumberland that provide exciting and stimulating exhibitions, community outreach and educational programmes. Many thousands of people each year either visit one of our sites or engage with our community projects or online resources. We have set ourselves a vision to be: A national cultural leader known for connecting people with Northumberland and its history to enrich communities and enhance individuals' lives.' <http://www.experiencewoodhorn.com/woodhorn-charitable-trust/>

<sup>162</sup> Christopher Morphey and Matthew Hartley, 'Mission Statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric across Institutional Type', *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(3), (2006) 457-471, (p 466).

<sup>163</sup> Milligan, p. 22.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

events'.<sup>165</sup> To include all these fragmentary traces, to account for women's history wholesale presents a problem for the archive even when there is an acknowledgement that such fugitive presences should be accounted for.

As with the Discovery Museum and its phallic symbol of *Turbinia*, Woodhorn's statuesque architectural and geographical locus is a world conjuring the ghost of industrial man, even though that world has long since been transformed and the *demos* is no longer only comprised of an exclusively male community. The community cooperation which is memorialised in Woodhorn's coverage of the 1985 Miners Strike is still evident in the campaign to stop the open-cast bid at Druridge Bay. But in this instance, the community as represented by the Save Druridge Bay Campaign have no presence in Woodhorn's most prominent exhibit.<sup>166</sup> Caswell argues that by 'recognizing oral, visual, and kinetic ways of knowing, community archives reflect the culture, epistemologies, and values of their communities'.<sup>167</sup> This approach necessitates an acknowledgement of diverse affect in the archive, an engagement with the idiosyncratically fragile and their untidy, sometimes painful truths. During my research at Woodhorn there was no evidence of or context for signifiers of contemporary resistance, and no permanence for working-class women's past and present political and social activism.<sup>168</sup>

However, there is an inferred female presence, robust and persistent, as light as the feathers which lie about the site but lacking the requisite attributes of 'publicness' necessary to be deemed worthy of anything more than an ephemeral intervention. Yet, just as with the persistent sprig of ivy, feathers are also insistent, Marie-Louise von Franz, a Jungian psychologist and scholar reminds us that they are an affective symbol of 'invisible and imperceptible currents' because of their mobility.<sup>169</sup> Feathers indicate a communion beyond our own immediate perceptions. One might pick a feather up and hold onto it for luck. It might find its way into one's effects, rediscovered at some later

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<sup>165</sup> Antoinette Burton foreword, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. by Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry Katz and Mary E Perry (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p vii.

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.savedruridge.co.uk/>

<sup>167</sup> Caswell, 2014, p. 313.

<sup>168</sup> Woodhorn (March 2017) have recently screened the artist Jeremy Dueller's '*The Battle of Orgreave*' (2001), which with a concurrent campaign to have the role of the police during the Miner's Strike re-investigated speaks to an ongoing and reactive engagement with the recent past and its contemporary conflicts. My visits took place 2014/2016.

<sup>169</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Book of Symbols Reflections on Archetypal Images (The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism)*, ed by Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin, (Cologne: Taschen, 2010) p 242.

date and its purpose wondered at. The affect of a feather may be to whisper its witness, but just as with the ivy, it does not directly articulate a demand for inclusion.

I did not find any of the direct testimony regarding working-class female munitions workers that I was looking for at Woodhorn, yet the fragmentary objects and markings I did find offered a challenge to the status quo. At Woodhorn I found a space celebrating, in monumental architecture, the glories of an industrial past in a conflicted landscape. A landscape and culture both celebrated and memorialised, but also attempting to escape the grip of its decimated industrial past. A location conflicted by contemporary extraction industry pressures which might bring a small number of heavy-machinery jobs but would negatively impact the museum's footfall. With so many recreational choices available to the public, who wants to fund or visit a museum and archive in a re-industrialised landscape with all its attendant noise and pollution?<sup>170</sup> This actuality might disrupt the prevailing narrative of a heritage industry which, as Thorleifsson attests, functions in 'praise of the past'.<sup>171</sup> To incorporate a context of contemporary activism within the frame of the archive would problematize that archive's embedded neutrality and public mission. We praise the activism of the past but cannot sanction the activism of the present because the archive serves as a refuge from the unresolved problems of the present. The archive is no place for subtlety or difficult questions.

Time spent within the archival spaces of the Discovery Museum and Woodhorn Museum continued to generate more questions than were answered. The opportunity arose to begin a discourse with an archivist at a third location in a more personal, creative and collaborative archival conversation. This research pointed me towards, if not the actual voice of a working-class female munitions worker, then a version of her voice recorded in the 1970s in an oral history featuring the memories of one working woman's experiences during the First World War.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Sajid Javid, the previous Secretary of State for Communities, made this statement on Twitter re: Druridge Bay opencast, on 23/03/2018: '[...] taking into account all evidence and material considerations, inc. potential environmental impacts, I've refused the application [...]'. This statement, although welcome, is made in light of the new Paris Climate Agreement which the UK government signed up to in March 2016. It does not account for the prevailing arguments of heritage and the memorialization of industry examined in this chapter. Banks Mining Group have lodged a high court appeal against Javid's decision.

<sup>171</sup> Thorleifsson, p. 561.

<sup>172</sup> Knox, p. 106.



### Chapter 3. Durham County Record Office

In order to contextualise oral histories, we also need to survey the dominant ideologies shaping women's worlds; listening to women's words, in turn, will help us to see how women understood, negotiated and sometimes challenged these dominant ideals.<sup>173</sup>

Sangster 'Telling our stories: feminist debates and the uses of oral history'

From Woodhorn Colliery and Museum one travels some thirty-seven miles, past the location of the Discovery Museum in Newcastle city centre, to Durham County Record Office. The A1 motorway mirrors the route of the original Roman military road 'Dere Street'. It heads through the heart of the ex-mining communities situated on the strata of coal which typify this eastern edge of the North-East landscape and the archival sites in which I was searching for the fugitive Molly. A definitive presence for my eponymous heroine was proving to be as difficult to unearth as 'winning the coal' is in local folk and canonical memory.<sup>174</sup>

The Record Office is situated in County Hall on the edge of Durham at Aykley Heads. The building is fifty-four years old and, at the time of its completion, was described in *The Northern Echo* as 'a contemporary building with a blend of dignity and grace', it embodied the area's claim to be a 'giant of enterprise.'<sup>175</sup> Aykley Heads was the site of Durham City's last functioning colliery, the seams of coal had been worked-out by 1949, thereafter the mine closed, and the site fell into disrepair. New building work was begun in 1961 and completed in 1963. This major construction project was a local precursor to the economic and infrastructure developments which typified Harold Wilson's Labour Government (1964–1970) and the optimistic promotion of the white heat of a technological revolution. White heat which would eventually extinguish the region's dominance in heavy industry and dwarf its global enterprises. Some twelve

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<sup>173</sup> Sangster, p. 10.

<sup>174</sup> From 'Gresford' - The Miner's Hymn: 'They spend their lives in dark, with danger fraught, | Remote from nature's beauties, far below, | Winning the coal, oft dearly bought | To drive the wheel, the hearth make glow.'

<sup>175</sup> [http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/4536266.Listing\\_plea\\_for\\_County\\_Hall/](http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/4536266.Listing_plea_for_County_Hall/)

years after those heady days of social and economic boom, the 'Winter of Discontent' plunged the country into industrial strife and turmoil. Consequently, the Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, promised and delivered the denuding of union power and the asset-stripping of former industrial power-houses. This decline, conversely, heralded the beginning of women's dominance in the regional jobs market as referenced by Knox regarding the local cultural/archival persistent mythology of regional economic output solely dominated by a male workforce.<sup>176</sup> Today in a long-term project, which cash-strapped Durham County Council hopes will bring new higher-paid jobs to the city, County Hall is due to be demolished and redeveloped. Durham County Record Office and its archive will be moved to a different area of the authority.

The atrium of County Hall, with its marble floors, open-plan central staircase, plate-glass floor-to-ceiling picture windows and reception desk of buffed pine, speaks to the building's former civic pride. A kind of Scandinavian clarity prevails with clean lines and open-vistas. However, there is also an air of neglect, a shabbiness in the corners and at the edges. It is a building to which goodbyes have already been said. The county's archives are situated on the ground floor through unremarkable doors. According to the website, the holdings span 'almost 900 years, from about 1122 to the present day, and occupies four miles (6.5km) of shelving [and] are stored in strong rooms where they are protected from theft and fire, and where the temperature and humidity are controlled'.<sup>177</sup> Behind these doors it is local authority business as usual. With small windows and cramped conditions, the corridors and offices could be any twentieth-century council building unsuited to the paraphernalia of twenty-first century office life with its attendant printers, scanners, computer consoles and hard-drives. The archivist I visited occupies a narrow office with a functional but tiny window at one end. At one time, this former cupboard would have been a place to store reprographic supplies, carbon paper, official forms, sheaves of paper, spools of typewriter-ribbons. Today it is lit by computer display and cluttered with maps, copies of documents; smartphones beep and are consulted. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss a woman called Lizzie Holmes.

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<sup>176</sup> Knox, p. 112.

<sup>177</sup> <http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/article/10511/About-Us>



Lizzie was from Horden in County Durham and had been interviewed for the *Easington People Past and Present* project in 1976.<sup>178</sup> Her oral history is testimony to Sangster's consideration, cited at the beginning of this chapter, of the ideological conflicts present in acts of witness such as Lizzie's testimony. In engaging with Lizzie's story, and the manner in which she told it, I was to further appreciate the value of 'affect and viewing records as repositories of feeling [which] would enable archives more fully and directly to identify and capture intimacy'.<sup>179</sup> This deeper investigation of Lizzie's story also contributed to the notion that those engaging with archival remnants and their absences are building a 'relationship of witnessing to the archival realm'.<sup>180</sup> Carolyn Forché in ascribing witness to poetic practice asserts that to witness is to account for 'how larger structures of the economy and the state circumscribe, if not determine, the fragile realm of the individual.'<sup>181</sup> In order to further understand and apply the significance of archival witness in the absence of a nuanced working-class female representation in the archive I considered feminist oral history theorizations, working in coalition with archival affect theory, to be useful. Facilitating an understanding of the sub-textual pressures and circumscription in operation, reaching towards that which lies beneath the words and voice of the individual fragile realm. 'Oral evidence strongly reinforces the idea that official records grossly underestimated the extent and nature of women's work. It also brings to prominence those industries which figure most strongly in women's collective work-consciousness'.<sup>182</sup> Here, Knox, from her particularly local perspective, asserts that oral evidence is often the best resource available in attempting to assemble an alternate female history of the silent or in this case, not so silent, female.

In the transcript of the audio recording Lizzie Holmes describes herself as being 'rough and ready'. She was orphaned, and managed to continually avoid the Schools Inspector, the 'kiddy-catcher', as she calls him.<sup>183</sup> She does not reflect on the details of her rickety start in life. She invites no sympathy.<sup>184</sup> Pre – First World War Lizzie, at the age of thirteen, had set herself to work at a ropery in Hebburn, South Tyneside.

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<sup>178</sup> <http://ppparchive.durham.gov.uk/photos/listphotos.asp?area=Easington%20Colliery>

<sup>179</sup> Cifor, p. 9.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> [http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/forche/witness.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/forche/witness.htm)

<sup>182</sup> Knox, p. 106.

<sup>183</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

Ropeworkers were predominately female and were notorious on Tyneside. Knox quotes one Tynesider's reminiscence from Nigel Gray's *The Worst of Times* (1986). Any man offered work in the roperies would quail at the prospect: 'These women were practically dehumanised because of the conditions they worked and lived under. They'd strip him and they'd probably rupture him through their frolicking.'<sup>185</sup> The ropery women, nicknamed 'Haggie's Angels', were formidable and Lizzie Holmes appears to have been no exception to that reputation.<sup>186</sup> At fourteen she had her childhood sweetheart's name tattooed on her arm and was married to him in 1913.<sup>187</sup>

At the onset of the First World War, Lizzie began work in the coke-ovens where native coal was compressed into industrial coke for blast furnaces. In the interview, she boasts at being the first woman in Horden to wear trousers.<sup>188</sup> She also played football for a munitionettes team. This positive sporting achievement for working class women like her has recently been incorporated back into the narrative of the larger local archive and popular culture, as evidenced by the press materials I quoted from the Discovery Museum's 'Wor Life' pop-up exhibition in Chapter One and a recent Channel Four television documentary.<sup>189</sup> Lizzie, as did a selection of other female footballers, became something of a local celebrity. The armistice ended any further work or fame for Lizzie, her husband survived the war and was demobilized:

Now when the war finished and the men came home from the war, Mr Holmes came home, he wanted to go back to the pit [...] He wanted rigging out for the pit. So he was a cobbler, he could *make* a pair of shoes, never mind mend a pair. So he put the bars, leather bars across my football shoes, he made them his pit shoes till he got a pay, until he could go and get a pair of pit shoes.<sup>190</sup>

As she testified above, Lizzie gave her football boots to her husband so that he might return to work. There is no physical evidence of Lizzie's notable, but truncated football and work career in the archive. No photograph of the tattoo, no pair of battered football

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<sup>185</sup> Knox, p. 107.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>187</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/when-football-banned-women>

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

boots repurposed into pit yackers' shoes, not even a shrivelled pair of laces, only her testimony recorded by an obscure community project in 1976. Obscure, but relevant, because as Cifor states, 'community archives literature has extended the discussion'.<sup>191</sup> Lizzie's community-held story chimed with my research for the absent voices of female working-class munition workers on Tyneside during and after World War One. She appeared to be a woman who, from the evidence of her oral history, had the boldness to protest at any negative change to her economic circumstances. Perhaps some of the women in the area had protested at their redundancies, perhaps Lizzie could give a voice to a discontent which Lady Parsons articulated in the sources brochure I had uncovered from the 1980s and its scant traces in the Discovery Museum. Lizzie's appeared to offer a challenge to an orthodoxy of compliance by her memories of the tattoo she had and her pride in her physical strength. Her testimony offered a compelling route towards further hidden alternates of experience. Fluttering kisses were not Lizzie's style, but could her witness provide evidence of the submerged conflict for working-class women, present, as Sangster suggests, in the 'perceived choices and cultural patterns they faced, and the complex relationship between individual consciousness and culture'?<sup>192</sup> Although Lizzie appeared to have had a robust enough attitude to question authority, but she had given up her football boots to her husband, a husband who would prove to be less than worthy of them.

In 1918 a proportion of the population of women were finally given the franchise under the Representation of the People Act. If Lizzie had owned property and been over thirty years of age, she might have been rewarded, for her efforts during the war and for her footballing prowess, with the right to vote, but in 1918 Lizzie was twenty-five, owned no home and was therefore ineligible. She and many disenfranchised women like her are outside the frame of what is represented in the local archive as the working-class, female experience of the First World War. While mindful of the lives lived 'somewhere else', historians cannot ignore that in many cases women, no matter how obscure 'were there too'.<sup>193</sup> These women are idiosyncratic individuals not some amorphous normative mass. Bishop characterizes the re-examining of these working-class women's testimonies as being part of 'the new visibility of ordinary women's

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<sup>191</sup> Cifor, p. 13.

<sup>192</sup> Sangster, p. 6.

<sup>193</sup> Catherine Bishop, 'The Serendipity of Connectivity: piecing together women's lives in the digital archive', *Women's History Review*, (2016), 2-15, (p. 8).

public lives [which] alters our entire understanding of women's role in history. With this in mind, Lizzie's sacrifice of her football boots may not only have been of a very personal nature, but an example of individual complex action which illuminates a particular moment with relevance to an understanding of the impact of conflict and the self-sacrifice perceived as being necessary and natural on the trajectory of these women's lives. Through Lizzie's testimony I was being offered a further development of my understanding of why the presence of the women for whom I was searching was ephemeral, indistinct and contradictory, because their own testimony, when available, was also contradictory. Despite all her bluster, why had Lizzie not put up a fight? Reminiscing about her experiences during the war, Lizzie's transcribed testimony details her footballing exploits, the train journeys and places she visited: 'We used to travel around every weekend, to play football. Then we got our new football uniforms.'<sup>194</sup> If we conjecture that Lizzie must have enjoyed playing football, then at the end of the war she relinquished to her husband her means of participating in the 'beautiful game'. Did she sense the winds of change which heralded the banning of women's professional football in 1921, whereby she would have been further denied the possibility of ever playing at a semi-professional or professional level? Or was war an exceptional circumstance and at the hostilities cessation she wished, accepted, and/or desired a return to 'normality', even though Lizzie's normal was already apparently unusual. She does not directly speak to her potential footballing-exploits disappointment in either her audio or transcribed testimony. Knox provides a rationale for this in her examination of Tyneside's women, who despite their physical and mental capabilities, were driven by an internalized ideology and its established boundaries: 'to transgress these boundaries [...] was to expose men to the risk of being classified as 'effeminate'.<sup>195</sup> Lizzie gives no transcribed iteration of clashing with the status-quo of the day or of transgressing its boundaries, but her original audio tape from 1976 and the transcribed testimony which is also available on the Durham at War website is tantalisingly conflicted.

The cadence of her voice, a woman who self-describes as rough and ready, is light and lilting.<sup>196</sup> It certainly is the voice of an elderly lady and a voice changes over the

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<sup>194</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

<sup>195</sup> Knox, p. 103.

<sup>196</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/>

decades, but it does not sound like the voice of a woman who ‘would often be the one called on to shift hundredweight bags of cement.’<sup>197</sup> This physical prowess, the matter of the tattoo, and the relative size of her and her husband’s feet is something I and the archivist discussed. Wallace argues that allowing individual memories to have archival affect, although ‘an ongoing site of disputation’, allows for a ‘larger reality’, and that ‘subjective and distorted memory formations constitute and animate society’.<sup>198</sup> He contends that by availing ourselves of the dynamics of contention we enter into a discourse with and challenge to ‘dominant narratives.’<sup>199</sup> These undocumented significant details promoted conjecture and speculation in my discussions with the Durham County Record archivist, provoking a collaborative dialogue in which we determined to allow the subjective and the objective to bear equal priority.

One of the questions provoked was with regard to the size of Lizzie’s feet. If her husband was a cobbler, as she asserted, did he in some way also lengthen the pit boots? Did Lizzie’s husband put up with the discomfort of tight boots to bring in an immediate income? What had been his experience of the war and did it effect his return to work? These circumstantial questions were asked not to so much gain insight into him, but to try to get to know Lizzie Holmes. As Sangster reminds us, oral histories have been embraced because of a need to fill the gaps, because it offers a way of re-integrating women into the picture created by historical scholarship and ‘contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women’s lives.’<sup>200</sup> But just as with Steedman’s notion of enforced narration, Sangster warns us that oral histories can also, just as well, support ‘expressions of ideologies whether dominant, submerged [or] oppositional’.<sup>201</sup> Women’s stories and testimony arise through entanglement with the authorities or reflexively via the experience of their husbands, partners and male family members’ more frequently recorded experiences. Invisible women with hidden voices are often only known by default, and when heard they might still remain hidden behind a default position of necessary compliance.

In analysing Lizzie Holmes’ recollections for significant detail and undercurrents of an unconscious assimilation of the hegemony of Tyneside’s cultural mythology, not

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<sup>197</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

<sup>198</sup> Wallace, p. 175.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>200</sup> Sangster, p. 5.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

only the given circumstances of her life at the time and lived up to that point must be accounted for, but also the circumstances of the interview. As Shopes reflects, the oral history can be considered as a reciprocal creation between the interviewee and interviewer: it has a 'dialogic nature'.<sup>202</sup> This observation invites such questions as: where did the interview take place? Was Lizzie at home? In residential care? Was she familiar with her interviewer? Were there other people present? Who interviewed her? Though one must surely be wary of allowing the external elements of the interview to override any compelling content, we also need, as Sangster argues, 'to continually analyse the interview as an interactive process, examine the context of the interview, especially inherent power imbalances'.<sup>203</sup> In listening to Lizzie's story, therefore, what are the performative elements of her testimony which must be taken into consideration?

The voice on the sound file is of a male interviewer and in the transcript generated from the audio recording it is clear from Lizzie's responses that she is speaking with someone familiar to her, someone local to her.<sup>204</sup> She mentions street names and asks him if he knows the streets she means, and he gives his assent. She speaks of moving to her present house, so we can assume she is still in her own home. We can assume that no-one else is present at the interview as no one is mentioned either in the audio or transcript of the meeting. From analysing her transcribed responses, one assumes that Lizzie is at her ease, in her own home, speaking with someone she is relatively familiar with. Familiar with enough to indicate a relationship with her husband that had some difficulties, but not to comprehensively or definitively elaborate on those difficulties. Sangster reminds oral historians that 'new attention to language and the way in which gender is itself shaped through the discourses available to us can offer insight as we analyse the underlying form and structure of our interviews'.<sup>205</sup> The structure and form of Lizzie's interview is characterized by the interruptions of Lizzie's laughter. The difficulties she encountered she often laughs away. This laughter is indicated by parentheses in the transcript but is audible on the sound file. Her apparent amusement is most often employed when recalling events concerning her power, her lack of conformity and her marriage. Ramachandran

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<sup>202</sup> Linda Shopes, "'Insights and Oversights': Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 41(2), (2014), 258 – 268, (p. 259).

<sup>203</sup> Sangster, p. 13.

<sup>204</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

<sup>205</sup> Sangster, p. 14.

maintains that laughter can be understood as a defensive response, particularly when no joke has been made, or an anecdote told with no apparent punchline; rendering the ethological survival mechanism of laughter 'internalized to deal with cognitive anomalies in the form of a new type of psychological defence mechanism'.<sup>206</sup> Lizzie laughs at her own jokes, and literally laughs away trouble or contentious content, particularly when her husband had yet again evaded returning to the Front:

When he got leave I used to say, 'I wish they hadn't given him leave, because he'll not gan back!' [...] So up to his mother's I ran, about dinner time the next day and said, 'Well, he's got away, they came for him last night again.' It was pay Friday and she says, 'Aye, and do you think he's getting (gone) away?' I says, 'Yes, I've made him gan this morning, eight o'clock.' But when I went into the kitchen he was sitting getting his dinner (laughs). So he hadn't gone.<sup>207</sup>

Lizzie's laughter is a recurring incursion in the interview, but there are other sub-textual indicators. In analysing oral histories for significant but cloaked detail, Sangster reminds us that 'we need to unearth the underlying assumptions or 'problematic' of the interview, and to analyse the subtexts and silences, as well as the explicit descriptions in the interview.'<sup>208</sup> For example in the audio tape, Lizzie, as people often do when relaying an anecdote, acts out the conversation she had with her husband at the end of the war about his return to the pit. His reported speech is inferred by her responses. There is an affronted tone in her voice, but the affront is unexpressed in the written word as recorded by the transcript. This tone is only apparent by listening to the audio tape and subsequent analysis of Lizzie's transcribed language. It is vital to a deeper understanding of the pressures within Lizzie's marriage, alerting us to what Ginzburg called 'marginal data' within an evidential paradigm which can be used to frame Lizzie's experiences in the context of the hidden and unremarked in the archive.<sup>209</sup> In a similar manner to the supposed objectivity of the archive, Lizzie passes no observation on the

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<sup>206</sup> V.S. Ramachandran, 'The Evolutionary Biology of Self-Deception, Laughter, Dreaming and Depression: Some Clues from Anosognosia', *Medical Hypotheses*, Volume 47, (1996) 347-362, (p. 361).

<sup>207</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

<sup>208</sup> Sangster, p. 7.

<sup>209</sup> Ginzburg, p. 101.

events, she merely reports them, but her tone in the audio file is combative. She iterates *all* the items her husband would need to start at the pit:

Where's tha' gonna get a pair of pit hoggies I says?  
You'll want a pair of pit hoggies now to gan back to pit.  
You want pit shoes to gan back to pit, you want pit stockings  
to gan back to pit. Wanted rigging out for the pit.<sup>210</sup>

'Pit hoggies' were the special breeches worn by colliers at work. Her recorded statements here are replete with interrogatives of 'where' and 'want', he '[wants] rigging out for the *pit*'; this word repeats and repeats. When she asserts that her husband was a cobbler and could make a pair of shoes just as well as mend a pair, is this a veiled criticism of his unstated determination to take her football boots no matter what? Knox states that: 'The ability to work, and the type of work done, formed an integral part of entry into "manhood". Work, masculinity and a man's position in house and community as the family breadwinner were inextricably linked to men's self-evaluation.'<sup>211</sup> Was Mr Holmes entitled to the boots because of the tyranny of the male wage packet within the economic culture of the North-East? For all Lizzie's apparent agency and experience she appears not to engage with his expression of this tyranny. A potential answer to the question of why she did not do so came from a further transcription of her story in the Beamish Museum's online 'People's Collection'. This is a description of the contents of Lizzie's interview and adds to Lizzie's above statements regarding her husband's absenteeism and states that: 'Husband used to try to not go back to war, when he got leave [...] Husband lost his war pension because wouldn't go for a medical, never put himself forward for things'.<sup>212</sup> This provides an alternate context and presents a conjectural picture of a somewhat feckless and dispiriting man who wilfully missed out on his war pension because he 'never put himself forward for things', but who, despite the strength of his wife's character, still performed his role as 'head' of the household. This return to the status-quo appears to have been accepted by Lizzie, at least within the context of her interview.

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<sup>210</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/113/>

<sup>211</sup> Knox, p. 103.

<sup>212</sup> <http://collections.beamish.org.uk/search-detail?item=AUD2008-61&query=holmes&searchType=audio&hiQuality=0&withPhotos=0&filterQuery=>



These conflicts and contradictions reemphasise the case for an oral history approached not only by means of the transcribed words or recorded voices but by considering that 'other ingredients of the narrative form, such as expression, intonation and metaphors also offer clues to the construction of historical memory.'<sup>213</sup> Subsequent interpretations and transcriptions also offer contextual and framing alternatives. In this context, this alternative testimony is further confirmed by the fuller transcript of Lizzie Holmes' interview now available: 'But the father wouldn't go to beg or nowt (nothing) off nobody you know, so he lost his pensions through being stupid. He wouldn't go if there was any relief to seek, no, I had to do all that.'<sup>214</sup> Lizzie goes on to relate that 'stupid' Mr Holmes did not stay in one job, that he had chest problems due to his war experiences but would not go to the authorities for help; he left that up to his wife. These complaints are edited-out from the available audio file. This infers a question of a post-recording narrational enforcement, a removal of an awkward truth: the calling of a soldier returned from the First World War 'stupid'. Was it problematic for a community oral history project to allow this errant commentary? Is so, then it must be acknowledged that the prioritising of community archives over the official record does not necessarily ensure accuracy, even an accuracy borne of a perceived appeal to historical restitution for the inclusion of marginalized groups' experiences. Sangster herself encountered problems of interpretation when researching trade union activism. In her interview with a male trade union official she remarks that: 'Suspecting I was a feminist, his role vis à vis the defence of women's rights in the union became aggrandised in his interview, beyond my own reading of the written record.'<sup>215</sup> An indication, perhaps, of a self-conscious redressing of structural power imbalance by a self-aware official. However, when viewed within the context of an archival discourse this example is a persuasive argument for the allowance of affect in the archive. Community-orientated evidence is framed by a complex of enforced narration, archival documentation and extraneous but relevant material. Shopes understands this as being a reading of the interview beyond that of an historical document and a movement into the realm of understanding it as a literary text, a narration of a truth with, perhaps, an unreliable narrator.<sup>216</sup> A performative operation in which there is no one wholly

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<sup>213</sup> Sangster, p. 9.

<sup>214</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

<sup>215</sup> Sangster, p. 8.

<sup>216</sup> Shopes, p. 257.

accurate truth, a demonstration of a psychological rendering of Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* in which we ourselves, in relating our stories are buffeted by cross-winds of opinion, feeling and constraint. It is imperative that context and detail inflect the affective archival realm and challenge received opinion.

The unreliable presentation of self is further demonstrated by the contested narrative within the archive regarding Lizzie's tattoo. The 'People's Collection' website at Beamish Museum catalogue description states that Lizzie: 'Got tattoo of boy she liked, while still at school, with group of friends, one wrongly spelled; pretending she had another. Had to pull sleeves down to hide it while in service uniform'.<sup>217</sup> However, the transcript available within the 'Durham at War' materials of Lizzie's interview relates a fuller story. The story is of some other hapless girl getting the wrong tattoo, not Lizzie, and Lizzie laughs at the recollection:

I wanted James Holmes and this girl that was last wanted Henry Tummelty, well, on she got underneath this machine and when it touched on her hand, she started yelling and shouting, we just said to her, 'Oh, put it on, put Henry Tummelty on.' She was crying and shouting that much when he got finished with her he had Henry Tunnerty on, not Tummelty (laughs).<sup>218</sup>

I left my archivist colleague to begin to research the popularity or anomalies of tattooing historically amongst working class women in the North East. I returned to the nature of Lizzie's presentation of self, embodied by her conflictual laughter, an indicator of 'the richness that lies below the surface of an interviewee's words, the ways these words are deeply implicated in structures of meaning that refer outward to broader cultural constructions.'<sup>219</sup> Lizzie laughs during her assertions about her physical strength: 'Yes, hundredweight bags. They would say, "Send Lizzy up, she'll carry a bag of cement. We would carry a bag of cement before the men would carry one."' <sup>220</sup> Was Lizzie laughing in the face of adversity because of the cultural constructions which sent her back to domestic service at the end of the war, where footballing exploits, independence and meaningful wages would count for nothing?

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<sup>217</sup> <http://collections.beamish.org.uk/search-detail?item=AUD2008>

<sup>218</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

<sup>219</sup> Shopes, p. 264.

<sup>220</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

There is some local evidence, as I had seen as part of the Joicey Collection at the Discovery Museum, that for many other skilled and semi-skilled female workers a return to 'service' was counter to their newly discovered ambitions about the possibilities of more meaningful and relatively profitable work.<sup>221</sup> Selina Todd in her recent work *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* provides wider evidence that 'the government's unemployment policies focused not on creating jobs, but on coercing women into domestic service. The right-wing press supported its stance. "Their "life of idleness" thundered a Times editorial, "ought not to be paid out of the public purse"'.<sup>222</sup> Lizzie had been in service before the war and speaks at length about returning to cleaning and skivvying for various households in the area. She does not complain but boasts about the amount of work she took on. One wonders whether this default laughter and braggadocio, which is also evident when Lizzie speaks of putting aside her footballing and her skills in equipping and constructing coke-ovens, hides a concomitant pain, allowing the archive to acknowledge that 'there are times, places and spaces where lives are explicitly lived through affects (love, pain, pleasure, hope)' <sup>223</sup> The possibility that we do not always mean what we say or say what we mean, and that feelings can be shielded from perceived agencies of state power no matter how apparently 'soft' such as a representative from a community project. This acknowledgment of sub-text and affect re-energizes our understanding of the role of working-class women in the economic picture of the region and enables a nuanced narrative to emerge. For example, the transcribed Beamish Museum report describes Lizzie as having to pull her sleeves down in deference to her employers to hide her tattoo. The tattoo with a contested provenance that Lizzie got for her husband Jimmy Holmes. A husband who would not 'shift himself' to stick at hewing coal in Lizzie's football boots while she went out to skivvy for others, admonished to do so by the national press. Is this evidence of Lizzie's hidden pain or was she a pragmatist who did what she had to do knowing there was no viable alternative for a working-class woman in the North East in 1919 and that at all costs the status-quo, the tyranny of the domestic scene had to be preserved. To avoid these subjective complexities is to ask scholars and archivists to 'ignore how our work and relationships are mediated by affects, thereby excluding important relations through which we live

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<sup>221</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>222</sup> Selina Todd, *The People the Rise and Fall of the Working Class*. Amazon Kindle ed. (London: John Murray, 2015) Loc 713.

<sup>223</sup> Cifor, p. 12.

our lives, make societies and cultures and produce knowledge.'<sup>224</sup> With these given circumstances and playing the hand that life had dealt her, was it safer for Lizzie to laugh at her own achievements and, by doing so, prevent others laughing at her disappointments?

Lizzie's psychological barricades and the questions they provoked offered a parallel to the non-verbal communication of the so-called objective archive. As Derrida asserted: 'The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives.'<sup>225</sup> The testimony of working-class women is there, hidden in plain sight, but obscured by a prioritising negation of its import. It is domestic and inconsequential. It is laughed off. It is even devalued by its own progenitors – the women bearing evidence, Ignorance of the complexities of affect also thwarts any attempts to disseminate the material to the wider public because without the prism of affect, testimony is deemed too inconsequential and lacking in archival value. The archival experience prefers a binary rendering, a sequential narrative denoting progress. A deeper engagement requires the provision of time-consuming and expensive interpretation and navigation.

The personal testimony from Lizzie further confirmed Tyneside and the North East's prevailing industrial priorities which underscore the muting of women's presence in the archive. As previously stated, the area was reliant on heavy industry, particularly coal from which all the other attendant industries, such as ship-building and steel proceeded. Unlike the traditionally and predominantly female workers in the mills of Lancashire, the North-East industrial complex required a domestic workforce both in the home and in the wider community, tying women and men into a complex of expediencies, with a 'dominance of highly masculinised and skilled unions of shipyard and engineering factory and the all-male membership of mining and seafaring unions.'<sup>226</sup> This returns us to the ownership and tyranny of the male wage-pocket. Knox quotes Paul Willis and his assertion that on Tyneside and the surrounding industrial economy: 'the wage packet as a kind of symbol of machismo dictates the domestic culture and economy'.<sup>227</sup> Even with this accepted tyranny Lizzie Holmes' experiences during the war

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>225</sup> Derrida and Prenowitz, p. 9.

<sup>226</sup> Knox, p. 98.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

confirm, but also challenge the traditional narrative of the North East's working-class women's place at home. Women's economic role did not continue in the factories or engineering works, or, for Lizzie, physically strenuous labour in the coke ovens of Horden, in which she displayed significant pride at her own strength and willingness to work. Many women had been comprehensively trained during the war, but because there was a 'tendency to see women workers as a threat to pay and work conditions- their inclusion leading to dilution and de-skilling', they were put back to work in middle-class homes as hired help, servants, nannies and maids.<sup>228</sup>

My archivist colleague assumed that Holmes's story speaks to an already emancipated woman. As an orphan she had possessed a unique agency of her own because she was unshackled from family commitments early on in her life. The taking of a job in the local ropery enabled her assertive, devil-may-care attitude. However, my further investigations spoke to a more conflicted self-image and performative narration of her life's story, further exemplified by one small but persistent example. It appeared that Lizzie was not always so brave. She describes, twice, the story of hiding from the village children because she was the first woman in Horden to wear trousers, but goes on to boast of her singularity in this, and then laughs.<sup>229</sup> The contradictions within the elements of her own story that Lizzie chooses to tell or not complicate and bring nuance to her personal narrative, allowing an understanding of the 'ideological context [which] may help to unravel the apparently contradictory effects of ideology and experience.'<sup>230</sup> This understanding also further complicates Lizzie's place and that of others like her within the accepted historical narrative. We hear and read Lizzie Holmes, but she hides what she feels, and her testimony is a mass of contradictions. She laughs about potentially emotionally painful episodes; she takes pride in her physical prowess but was scared to walk through Horden in a pair of men's breeches, concerned about the comments the local children would make, even though she was proud of being the first woman to be dressed so, and proud of the work those breeches allowed her to engage with. Her default stoicism but unexplained trepidation speaks to Steedman's comments about, 'this sterner, older world [where] the iron entered', in this case, Lizzie's 'soul'.<sup>231</sup> There was a wealth of evidence in Lizzie's stories and various renderings of unspoken

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>229</sup> <http://www.durhamatwar.org.uk/material/642/>

<sup>230</sup> Sangster, p. 10.

<sup>231</sup> Steedman, 1986, p. 108.

misgivings and difficulties masked by long-suffering iron, but no indication for a moment of rebellion in which Lizzie and women like her may have been implicated, and about which Lady Parsons felt compelled to speak. The women's attitude to their skilled labour and how they felt about their conditions of work remain elusive - a frustrating and pervasive fugitive resonance, masked by a narrative of laughing compliance.

The archive is a rich and useful repository of information and detail, but it is not and cannot be everything that is known, returning us again to Derrida's statement that the archive, 'will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of the originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.'<sup>232</sup> What was proving to be most effective in my research was accessing what was not said and in Lizzie's case her words, noises, silences, laughter about football boots and her husband. These incursive outbursts could be montaged with the physical circumstances provided by the archival testimony, and historical detail of the experience in which Lizzie Holmes dwelt. Immersion in Lizzie Holmes' recorded memories of her contested football boots, and analyzing the pauses, rhythm and tone of her speech, offered a deeper context. Inhabiting and exploring the sights, sounds, smells and the possible nature of her physical interaction with her milieu may not create a historically accurate representation of Lizzie Holmes but allows an affective and empathetic resonance in which we ourselves enter her realm and dwell there with her. Once there the silences, elisions and absences can become more useful than frustrating because we allow ourselves to fill in the gaps or leave them in place as testimony to their shadowy presence, as evidence and placeholders of what might have been and could be there. Sangster acknowledges the inherent tensions, subjectivity and anecdote at play when coming to terms with the lack of evidence and testimony for women's lived lives:

When people talk about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths ... the guiding principle for [life histories] could be that all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for what purpose.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Derrida and Prenowitz, p. 14.

<sup>233</sup> Sangster, p. 5.

I had physically heard the voice of Lizzie Holmes, investigated her tone with my archivist colleague and analysed the content not only for the information it contained, but also in its rendition, for what it also may hide. Lizzie's self-told story offered a parallel with the obfuscations of the local archive, in this instance residing in a dusty corner of Durham County Record Office, a building that had once represented aspiration and civic autonomy.





## Chapter 4. The Literary & Philosophical Society

The landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves.<sup>234</sup>

Ingold *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*

I had encountered significant archival absences and ellisions in the locations I had, so far, researched in. These buildings were architecturally representative sites of an industry fuelled by the characteristic flinthead formation of the seams of coal which run from beneath the North Sea, under the River Tyne and the Discovery Museum, north to Woodhorn Colliery and south to the coalfields of County Durham, and Durham County Record Office. The vacated presence I sought was like a pebble removed from the centre of a dry-stone wall, the empty space delineating an outline of what had once existed. However, the caesura offered by the breach and propped open by its surrounding circumstances had begun to afford me a creatively stimulating perspective of the archival landscape.

Lady Katherine Parsons and her disobedient contribution to the discussion of the dilution of female munition workers had formerly had a place within the local archive at the Discovery Museum. At Woodhorn Colliery and Museum I had uncovered an alternate iteration of familial affection for which there was no place in an archive which, unconsciously or not, subscribes to an underestimation of working-class women's character and activism. Durham County Record Office provided relevant testimony from Lizzie Holmes' experiences in work during the First World War, but in a highly mediated rendition which necessitated a consideration of the sub-textual detail available in her oral history. Aided by Steedman et al I had navigated the absences of archival errata by dwelling in spaces which had, by and large, been repurposed to hold local archives. A profoundly different archival experience was to await me at the Literary & Philosophical

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<sup>234</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p 189.

Society in Newcastle upon Tyne. This building, institution and library has existed in the same geographical landscape and been used for the same purpose for over two hundred years. In this enduring place I was to come as close as I could to the differing voices and experiences of the women who worked in munitions on Tyneside during the First World War.

Travelling north from Durham County Record Office, one re-enters the city of Newcastle by crossing one of four bridges which span the river. The Redheugh Bridge leads onto Westgate Road which follows the river west out of the city. Running past the Discovery Museum, out of the city and partially along the line of Hadrian's Wall, and onto the Scotswood Road, the road runs parallel to the site of the once vast riverside complex of Sir W. G. Armstrong & Co Engineering Works. During the First World War the Armstrong Whitworth works, as it was then known, was an epicentre of munitions manufacture in the region and country.<sup>235</sup> Travelling back into the city and at the eastern end of Westgate Road at its intersection with Collingwood Street, you encounter the Literary & Philosophical Society. The building faces the city and has its back to those necessities of industry and commerce: the railway and the river. During the Industrial Revolution, and throughout Tyneside's industrial heyday, this intersection was amongst one of *the* places to live and do business for the rich and powerful of the city. The Lit & Phil, as it is familiarly known, houses not only an archive but it is also the repository for an extensive and relatively unmediated library which allows for a facilitation and an expansion of an understanding of 'cultural contexts and ways of knowing'.<sup>236</sup> These ways of knowing are imprinted in the volumes and the fabric of the building.

The notion of the expansion of cultural context and knowing was inherent in the founding principles of the Lit & Phil's beginnings in 1793 when it was begun as a conversation club by, amongst others, Reverend William Turner. As Robert Spence Watson describes in *The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society (1793 – 1896)*, the organisation had had its antecedents twenty years earlier. He notes that, 'upon March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1775, a small Philosophical Society, for the consideration of questions of mental and social philosophy, was started in Newcastle.'<sup>237</sup> The society continued to grow, and in 1792 a paper stating its aims was read at a meeting of the society by

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<sup>235</sup> Woollacott, p. 29.

<sup>236</sup> Cifor, p. 16.

<sup>237</sup> Ralph S Watson, *The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society (1793 - 1896)*, (London: Walter Scott Ltd, 1897) p 15.

Reverend Turner. The statement included the assertion that subjects of conversation should include: 'Mathematics, Natural Philosophy and History, Chemistry, Polite Literature, Antiquities, Civil History, Biography, Questions of General Law and Policy, Commerce and the Arts. Religion, Law, Medicine, referred to as 'Physic' and *all* Politics were deemed prohibited subjects of conversation.'<sup>238</sup> A library of works in English, French, Spanish, German and Latin would come later, and despite the exclusion of religion and politics as fit subjects, this liberal 'conversation club' was formalised. The debarring of the subjects of religion and politics was deemed necessary because debate was required to be 'consistent with a decent attention to those established opinions on the keeping of which the welfare of society in a great measure depends.'<sup>239</sup> Nevertheless, by Victorian standards, the organisation had an emancipated access policy. In his history Watson stated that '[as] far as I have been able to ascertain, ours was the first English Society which opened its doors to women'.<sup>240</sup> Taking pride in the significance of the inclusion of a female presence is noteworthy, although the institution has never yet had a female president.

From its early days, the Lit & Phil's interests were bound up with the city's most powerful residents. In his study of the economic and social history of the North East, McCord states that from prior to the First World War, the key economic, industrial and mercantile features of Tyneside's fiscal infrastructure 'were under the direct control of a relatively small and coherent group of men and women who met at the Lit & Phil.'<sup>241</sup> These men and women, comprised of bankers, shipyard owners, engineers and scholars, were polymaths. Some, such as Lady Katherine Parsons, were innovators in their own right. All had varying interests, including the study of history, local archaeology, art history, Virgil, and the improvement of scientific techniques. Extraction and its related industries were amongst the many developments and innovations of the day which aroused their curiosity and fired their intellectual pursuits, but this small coterie's power did not last. By 1897 a process had begun whereby local commercial interests had been persuaded to invest in national concerns regulated by the London Stock Exchange and thereafter to raising funds for the First World War. Purdue notes in his

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<sup>238</sup> Watson, p. 42.

<sup>239</sup> Patricia M. Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Frank Graham, 1983), p 13.

<sup>240</sup> Watson, p. 57.

<sup>241</sup> Norman McCord, *North East England an economic and social history*, (London: Batsford Ltd, 1979) p 147 – 148.

biography of the city that investment external to the city of Newcastle and increasing reliance on banks based in the capital undermined Newcastle's financial autonomy and meant that 'decisions as to the provision of capital were increasingly made outside Newcastle and Tyneside.'<sup>242</sup> This centralising of investment may be seen as being one of the factors which presaged the region's subsequent slow and painful decline, the decimation of its industry and the concomitant relatively high levels of unemployment which still exist today.<sup>243</sup>

In 1793, the annual subscription for the Lit & Phil was one guinea. Today, the subscription rate for students is forty-five pounds per year. It bears similarity to the Free Library of Philadelphia which, since it was founded in 1891 has also proved a fertile research location, because, as Cifor states, it has 'its own board and operates independently'.<sup>244</sup> Subscriptions and the Gift Aid tax-relief attendant on them also help the Lit & Phil continue to provide space for its contents and events, and to maintain the institution's independence in its grand location where it has survived despite the vagaries of its location's economic, industrial and social decline. The building, and the volumes, objects, texts, tracts and records it holds have endured the shifting political landscape over the centuries and throughout the Lit & Phil has managed to remain independent; surviving war, conflagration and near dissolution.<sup>245</sup> The remit of debate and ways of knowing have also evolved over time. Recent contemporary events and discussions have included debates on the culture of slavery in modern life, and poetry readings as an active creative response to wider current political events and upheavals.<sup>246</sup>

One enters the Lit & Phil from the street through heavy wooden doors which still have the original book-posting slot embedded in them with a corresponding wire cage to receive books returned out of hours. In the entrance hall, the balustraded stone staircase bisects half-way up, taking one either left via portraits of the founding members, or to the right – the scenic route – past the balanced proportions of the Georgian windows which overlook the Grade II-listed Collingwood Buildings opposite. The Collingwood Buildings that were once the centre of the region's independent banking system are now

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<sup>242</sup> A. W. Purdue, *Newcastle: A Biography*, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2012) loc 4741.

<sup>243</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regionallabourmarket/november2017#unemployment>

<sup>244</sup> Cifor, p. 17.

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.litandphil.org.uk/information/history/>

<sup>246</sup> <http://www.litandphil.org.uk/whats-on/past-events/?page=4>

home to a vodka bar called *Revolution*. Members of the Lit & Phil can borrow or access any of the books, but even if not a member, one can drink coffee, and browse the shelves and their eclectic contents, perhaps reading, if you so wish, about the effects of vodka on the Russian Space Race while you watch from the hallway's grand windows the effects of vodka on the party-goers opposite frequenting *Revolution* on a late-opening Thursday night.<sup>247</sup>

The Lit & Phil remains located at the heart of Newcastle and Tyneside's cultural life, if not its financial one. It is a liberal and multi-faceted institution, open to all. Many professional, amateur and emerging writers and thinkers of all persuasions use the library's panelled work spaces, scouring the galleries and rooms for forgotten first editions, battered copies of classical works, musical manuscripts, recondite theses and arcane scientific pamphlets for nuggets of archival gold. The Lit & Phil maintains a singular grasp on the affections of the literati and autodidacts of the North East. Members and visitors share a sense of the institution's historic and current values of independence. By email I questioned the writer Michael Chaplin about his relationship to the Lit & Phil. He replied that not only did he have an affection for the building's 'spiral staircase, the gallery of old books, the long table, the beguiling subterranean rooms', but what he holds to most deeply is the 'Lit & Phil's intimate connection to the Newcastle Enlightenment of 200 years ago and to so many of the good things of the city's present and future that have their genesis in this beautiful and inspiring institution.'<sup>248</sup> Chaplin articulates here a characterisation of Tyneside which celebrates the persistence of a robust, intellectual life born directly from the region's past industrial wealth, which also bridges apparent barriers of economic class.

The Lit & Phil represents an inclusivity of purpose which is not immediately apparent when encountering the other archival spaces of the Discovery Museum, Woodhorn Museum and the Durham County Record Office. As discussed, these latter spaces speak to Milligan's consideration of *publicité* in the archives of Second Empire France in which 'the focus on history and accessibility in the Archives made serving the public an essential part of the archivist's duty – the archivist was thus transformed into a nation builder.'<sup>249</sup> Milligan, echoing Derrida, goes on to argue that the archive 'stands

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<sup>247</sup> *Five Billion Vodka Bottles to the Moon: Tales of a Soviet Scientist*: Literary & Philosophical Society; Main Library; NONFIC 925.2/20.

<sup>248</sup> Personal email from Michael Chaplin: 07/10/2015.

<sup>249</sup> Milligan, p. 22.

at the nexus of state and citizen, public interest and private rights, between history and administration and politics and scholarship.<sup>250</sup> The Discovery Museum, Woodhorn Museum and Durham County Record Office have an embedded duty to the public which would appear to direct what is shared and exhibited. They have quasi-corporate governance designed to attract funding, whereby their mission statements and duty to the public are required to foster citizenship and nationhood, as defined by Tessa Jowell's 2005 consultation document mentioned in Chapter One. The Lit & Phil differs significantly because it is not subject to a direct political authority. It is accountable only to the authority of its members and supporters whom it engages with through events, talks and performances in the elegant rooms of its 'conversation library'.<sup>251</sup> This conversational and institutional independence may promote social allegiances which, as Wallace asserts, 'resist attempts to control the archives for fear of what interpretations may derive'.<sup>252</sup> The relative lack of intervention also encourages a serendipitous approach to research. Hoeflich asserts that archives and libraries must encourage what he calls 'planned chaos' and 'present the opportunities for serendipity to work its magic'.<sup>253</sup> Of course, the disbursement of public money requires public and governmental accountability which may be seen to lead to a bureaucratisation of the research process which limits exposure to the kind of productive chaos Hoeflich describes. Indeed, he sees danger in what he terms institutionally 'over-efficient and economically rational disposal policies'.<sup>254</sup> My research thus far had necessitated a navigation of a signposted trail through a mediated landscape and I had come across examples of the problems Hoeflich flags up. As I had found, some representations of the archival record can appear to prevent awkward or inconsistent elements from intruding on a settled and received narrative.<sup>255</sup> However, the Lit & Phil's archival holdings are reassuringly eclectic. They hold material relating to the polymathic range of interests of its founders and antecedents, including local and national literature, theatre, cinema, print and print culture, the history of reading, River Tyne Commission Reports, Estate

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.litandphil.org.uk/information/about-us/>

<sup>252</sup> Wallace, p. 186.

<sup>253</sup> Michael H. Hoeflich, 'Serendipity in the Stacks, Fortuity in the Archive', *Law Library Journal*, Volume 99, (2007) 813-827, (p. 814).

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p 814.

<sup>255</sup> Conversely, entirely independent ventures which teeter constantly at the edge of a funding deficit cliff edge may be a problematical notion for those of us who support the wholesale public funding of the arts and museums, galleries and services.

Household Books, literary periodicals, tracts, City Council proceedings, library catalogues and indexes, and a substantial amount of material relating to science, technology and innovation which speaks to the particular nexus of the intellectual and industrial character of Tyneside.

In my continuing search for an iteration of my character of Molly for my creative work *The Disappearance of Spoons* I wished to focus not on the Lit & Phil's archival holdings, but on its public library. To dwell in this public space. The 160,000 titles shelved there, amassed over two centuries, are as diverse as its archive, including works of fiction and nonfiction, poetry and plays, and representing an ongoing love affair with reading and research. Despite its original circumscribing of debate, the development of a more open-access policy at the Lit & Phil has allowed, as Watson stated in 1897, 'dreamers, thinkers and actors [...] rich or poor, great or humble', to enter its doors. This welcoming, open institutional attitude is what drew me to the library, but this policy also brought with it potential risks. The library's contents have passed through many hands and often bear the imprint of their usage, as did the volumes in Watson's time. He wrote then that:

The books were returned in a mutilated condition; alterations, erasures, inscriptions, and marginal notes were made in them; illustrations were removed and retained; books were lent to non-members; and many volumes joined that great regiment of lotos[sic]-eating works which is so painfully familiar to those who lend their books, and [are] returned no more.<sup>256</sup>

Watson's description of the fervour with which the books were handled and marked offers a further insight into the Lit & Phil as an institution. Today, due to its unobtrusive security system, books are no longer stolen, but you may come across volumes in 'a mutilated condition', often held together by string and ancient Sellotape, with faint marginalia inscribed from long-dead students and scholars.<sup>257</sup> Unless beyond repair, they remain on the shelves, their leaves continuing to flutter precariously through readers' fingers in the rarefied, but friendly, ticking-clock atmosphere. The imprints of readers past and present – on the books, the banisters, the spiral staircase – provide a

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<sup>256</sup> Watson, p. 177.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

tangible atmosphere of what Fleishman asserts is the 'past [...] inserting itself into the present'.<sup>258</sup> They can be perceived as a living embodiment of Steedman's 'dust' of history. Many of the materials and volumes in the Lit & Phil are not protected from invasive dust by white cotton gloves, or Perspex and laminate; they are representative of what Wallace characterizes as being part of, 'seemingly benign archives'.<sup>259</sup> The Lit & Phil's idiosyncratic and eclectic collection began, contemporaneously with Second Empire France's conferring of power on the archive, yet, beyond the purview of a similarly dust-gloved archival authority, therefore it may 'maintain a powerful ability to show cracks and fissures in seemingly legitimate structures'.<sup>260</sup> This ability to be in conversation with the past at the Lit & Phil is evident in the marks and tears in the volumes on the shelves, and these incursions embody Michel de Certeau's notion that 'history is not the objects in the archive; the material traces. It is what is done with them or on them'.<sup>261</sup> If this is so, then the Lit & Phil regulars, who converse and debate within easy reach of the refreshments hatch and the free biscuits, also provide an indication of the nature of this ongoing fragmentation and looping of the conversational time-frame.

When listened into these benign oval-table anarchists, laptop-tappers, readers of journals and the daily news, are expert in a diverse range of subjects. The hubbub of voices is contemporary but can be conceived as an aural continuum of all the past research and investigation that has taken place here for over two hundred years. As it may have been with their antecedents since 1793 their discourse covers a wide-range of subjects including, during my visits, metallurgy, the body politic, Roman History, and the Merchant Navy. The conversationalists have a direct and intimate relationship with the contents of the library. They regularly excuse themselves from the table to search the shelves for evidence to illuminate their points. In and of themselves they are an evolving archive, conversing with each other and the volumes on the shelves. Dwelling in the environment of the library in an embodiment of Ingold's conceptualisation of our relationship with landscape. The library is an emotive space capable of inspiring loyalty and devotion because it is 'pregnant with the past'.<sup>262</sup> As an institution and organisation it promotes a dialogue, a creative responsiveness to historical moment. It can be

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<sup>258</sup> Mark Fleishman, 'Cargo: Staging Slavery at the Cape', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, Vol. 21(1), (2011) 8-19, (p. 8).

<sup>259</sup> Wallace, p. 186.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>261</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 20.

<sup>262</sup> Ingold, p, 189.



considered to be affective because it is relatively unrestrained by any overbearing 'authorizing apparatus'.<sup>263</sup> It has a board, a chairperson and staff with administrative responsibilities, but it is organisationally self-governing and the management of its heterogeneous contents promotes Hoeflich's serendipitous investigations. This was to prove beneficial to my creative research.

When I had begun my research, I had hoped to find some primary material of historical moment relating to Molly – a letter perhaps, or a journal describing the experiences of munitions work, a spontaneous response to events recorded at the time of their occurrence. No such record had been forthcoming, but at the eclectic and conversational Lit & Phil, I found the locally published diaries of a woman called Ruth Dodds (1890 – 1976). Due to her relative prominence as a local figure, her diary is shelved at the Lit & Phil in the 'Local Studies' section.<sup>264</sup> She had worked briefly in munitions as a so-called 'Weekender'. Was this the material I sought, material from a specific locality, 'rich in [heretical] potential'?<sup>265</sup> Dodds came from a prosperous and civically-minded local family. Her diaries cover the years 1905 to 1974. Although not originally intended for publication, Dodds had some modest success as a writer and local public figure. Consequently, her journals were published towards the end of her life. They contain a wealth of material and, with a mixture of resonant observation and poetic lyricism, Dodds' concern for working class women is evident throughout. It is present in 1914 when, at the age of nineteen, she was secretary to her local branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. She makes little note of the business of specific meetings, but she does inveigh against the injustices of the day and how working-class mothers and children are portrayed by the authorities of the time:

14<sup>th</sup> Aug 1914: It is commonplace things like dirt & fleas,  
& [...] pawning your clothes, & 20/s a week being as much  
as anyone can expect, however many children there are that  
put me in the dumps. [...] How I hate the *Times* with no  
sympathy for any but the well-to-do, & the poorer you are the  
worse you must be. And no relief is to be given to women  
who are found to drink! What about their children? And  
would I (for one) drink if I lived in one of those holes? I  
should think so! <sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Eichhorn, p. 640.

<sup>264</sup> Dodds diary is currently being digitised by the Discovery Museum.

<sup>265</sup> Wallace, p. 186.

<sup>266</sup> Ruth Dodds, *A Pilgrimage of Grace: The Diaries of Ruth Dodds*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bewick Press, 1996) pp. 43 – 44.

As with the strident calling for the return to domestic service of the 'idle' female munitions workers seen in previous chapters, the intervention of the national press here is familiar. Dodds was writing privately, but there is evidence of the voice of a young woman with strongly held and principled views. A woman apparently not overly intimidated by authority, she was unafraid to voice her opinions – why would a hard-pressed woman not turn to drink? Her generous use of exclamation marks to punctuate her observations allows us to hear her tone of outrage. Her writing is often pierced with these marks, as if her words alone are not enough to convey the strength of her feelings. Just as with Lady Katherine Parsons' evocative but trenchant comments, the marks of kisses on the Chester-le-Street letters at Woodhorn, and the interruptions of laughter from Lizzie Holmes and her testimony held at Durham County Record Office, these punctuating incursions serve as witness. The marks and sounds on or within these materials, and the manner in which they are written or voiced, are, as already examined, are witness to a disregarded feminized responsiveness to political, social and environmental realities. In my researches insignificant detail continued to present a way to redress the imbalances of the marginalized presence in the archival record handed down as the prevailing historical truth. Cifor argues that it is incumbent upon archivists and scholars to, 'engage ethically in witnessing in archival contexts, [to] promote emotional justice'.<sup>267</sup> What was specifically of interest to me in Dodds' written witness was her experience of volunteering at the Armstrong Whitworth munitions works in the winter of 1915. As I began to read her words, I wondered what redress to emotional justice I would be able to determine experientially from the sights, sounds, tastes and smells of Dodds' descriptions of the work undertaken, and what insight might be provided sub-textually to the words she used to record her time there.

Writing in October 1915, Dodds captures the demands made on the women employed at the works. She observed that the hours worked were: 'twelve [...] out of twenty-four [...] at this time of year girls can hardly even see the sun once a day, for they go to work in the morning fog, & dark has fallen long before they come out'.<sup>268</sup> The harsh conditions and scale and duration of the work does not elude Dodds, but perhaps

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<sup>267</sup> Cifor, p. 19.

<sup>268</sup> Dodds, p. 54.

because she was not compelled by necessity to work there, she transforms her experiences into a lyrical evocation in prose, elevating the scene above the ringing clangs and bangs of grinding metal and constant industrial movement. She records:

the great gloomy echoing shops, where the artificial lights are always on & and the rushing of the machinery never stops. Outside the sunlight falls and the winds play on the river [...] And if you look up into the mysterious heights above you see all the belts, big & little, broad & narrow, turning, turning, & the dim shapes of the big power wheels above, & all the while the wheels clatter clatter, & the tongues chatter chatter on the benches, & the electric lights in the roof glare with great eyes down on you, while one little light carefully watches over each machine.<sup>269</sup>

This section is full of redolent detail by a writer who has no agenda but her own urge to conjure effectively the affective experience of the ‘great, gloomy echoing shops’.<sup>270</sup> In this respect, she is also ‘dwelling’, as understood by Ingold, in a landscape alien to her, but making sense of it for me, allowing me dramaturgical access to this environment, to the wonder and magnificence of what for Dodds’ was to become an internalized brave new world of large-scale industry. This awakening consciousness is a fluid movement through time via a witness in an interaction with materials and environments. Ingold elaborates further on this fluidity in which ‘the trajectories of diverse constituents are bundled together in diverse combinations.’<sup>271</sup> The diverse combination for me was reading Dodds’ diary entries and her witnessing of the experience of munitions work on Tyneside during the First World War, whilst I was situated in the library of the Lit & Phil, which not only held her published diary, but which she also frequented throughout 1915 and the rest of her life. Touching and reading the books she had touched and read I could absorb the stimulus of her surroundings in a fluid, almost biological discourse which spoke to the sensory nature of researching and dwelling in the library of the Lit & Phil.

But what of the other, less privileged employees at the works who were central to my research; the unremarkable and fugitive, without access to pencil, paper or

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<sup>269</sup> Dodds, pp. 53-54.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, pp. 53-54.

<sup>271</sup> Tim Ingold, *Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials*, (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2010) p. 11.

publisher? Sitting at the long table at the back of the Lit & Phil's James Knott room, delving further into Dodds' diary, I read this:

13 Oct 1915: [...] enjoyed training at Armstrongs immensely; we were shown how to work indexing machines for time fuses, [...] I was on the same machine nearly all the time, learning from a very nice little girl called Annie Peacock; she was only 20 and had worked at Armstrong's four years; she was pretty and fair and very slightly made, much shorter than I am, & and she worked her machine beautiful. She had a sister in another shop & her father had lost the sight of one eye by the explosion of a shell here.<sup>272</sup>

Dodds and Annie Peacock, a young working-class woman with a permanent position employed at Armstrong-Whitworth's, became work-friends. Here was the first individualised voice of a Tyneside working-class female munitions worker that I had encountered. The intimate and familiar tone of Dodds' writing allowed me to inhabit the scene, an invitation initiated by Dodds by comparing her height to Annie's, and her statement that Annie 'worked her machine beautiful'. This contraction of the grammatically correct 'beautifully' is typical of the Geordie dialect and I, as a fellow Tynesider, found it a further enticement to engagement. Her voice spoke directly to mine and to that of my potential Molly, just as Lady Parsons, the Hall family letters, and Lizzie Holmes had. Dodds delivered not only a picture of Annie, but also of herself, the articulate, sympathetic and subjective observer. Here, Shopes's observation that 'data, facts, and concrete information [along] with insights particular to their narrative, subjective, retrospective, and co-constructed qualities [...] develop new interpretations of the past [whereby] both the "facts" of experience and the subjective rendering of experience are types of evidence' suggests the value of what Dodds records.<sup>273</sup> Recording their encounters in her diary she did not appear to be striving for historical objectivity; rather inhabiting the 'now', a now represented by the grammatically incorrect rendering which personalizes her account and speaks to a non-self-censored narrator.

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<sup>272</sup> Dodds, pp. 52-53.

<sup>273</sup> Shopes, p. 267.

The evidence the young munitions worker Annie Peacock provides is in the form of the stories she told Dodds about her life at home, and her experiences at the works:

She told me lots of things – how one night last winter about 11 o'clock all the lights went out; the buzza had sounded three times, which meant they were turned off on purpose. For four & a half hours those two thousand girls waited in the dark, expecting Zeppelin bombs any moment. It was bitterly cold with the lights off, some screamed and some fainted, & some sang in chorus and some to themselves, & presently some lighted their gases and heated up their tea on them. As for Annie, she went into the next shop among the older girls and had a good sleep. She says it's terribly hard on night-shift; the girls take it alternate weeks the hours are seven to seven; twelve hours out of twenty-four.<sup>274</sup>

One wonders what songs the girls sang in chorus. Dodds does not answer that question, but her recollections of Annie's attitude and her sympathy for their co-workers presents us with a picture very much at odds with the stampeding girls of a post-Armistice report produced for Armstrong Whitworth by E. B. Jayne. Jayne's description of the scene within the works suggests a picture of chaotic conflict, stating: 'the girls [...] helped themselves when they felt inclined to other girls' belongings, and there was constant feud between the alternate shifts.'<sup>275</sup> Dodds' version does not necessarily detract from this account in all aspects. She records that the conditions in the munitions works before some kind of organisational order was imposed *were* disorderly and confused. Women worked punishing shifts, with no accommodation or provision for eating, washing or resting. Woollacott tells us that: 'Long hours, a stuffy and over-crowded atmosphere, and a lack of canteen, toilet, washing and first-aid facilities obtained in the majority of factories'.<sup>276</sup> This was a situation somewhat remedied by the provision of services after the initial rush of women to the munitions factories in 1915 of welfare officers and appropriate facilities including nurseries for babies. However, in Jayne's iteration produced after the end of the war, a picture of near-anarchy persists in the official

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<sup>274</sup> Dodds, p. 53.

<sup>275</sup> E. B. Jayne, *A Resume of Women's Welfare Work at Sir WG Armstrong Whitworth & Co Ltd*, (London: The Imperial War Museum, 1919) p. 34.

<sup>276</sup> Woollacott, p. 69.

report. An implied criticism of the 'girls' errant behaviour with no contrasting argument being offered regarding the disorganisation of unprepared officialdom. In contrast to Jayne's characterisation Dodds was so affected by the friendliness and inclusivity of the 'girls', the circumstances of her volunteering and her friendship with Annie, that she felt compelled to write a poem. She struggled, however, with a strong sense of its impropriety, which ties us back to the notion Jayne's reported version of these girls as being something of a rabble, who had to be restrained by the imposition of an authority. Dodds records:

*25 October. When I was at work in Shop 40 on Saturday last the spirits of the girls that work there every day seemed all around me, & this common- place, vulgar, music-hall-like song came into my head & I nearly wept over it. On Sunday when I thought of it I felt too ashamed to write it down.* <sup>277</sup>

This speaks to an overwhelming sense of cognitive dissonance for Dodds, putting her at odds with what she thought she ought to feel and the words she should use to express her feelings, as she encounters what Steedman summarises as 'the way something new is brought into the world by language – the words that tell.'<sup>278</sup> The act of writing threatens to bring a new unavoidable reality for Dodds. Later in the same entry, she explains how she found the courage to find the words, allow them to issue forth and put pen to paper. She writes of reading the preface to the collected works of poet and writer Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford), which had recently been published and a copy of which she found in the library of the Lit & Phil.<sup>279</sup>

In his preface, Ford admonishes poets who 'render [poetry] in terms of withering gourds and other poetic paraphernalia, it is, in fact, better to be vulgar than affected, at any rate if you practise poetry.'<sup>280</sup> Inspired by his assertion, Dodds wrote in her diary that 'the preface is all about writing poetry out of emotions roused by the things you are really in touch with & see & feel every day, even if they are of necessity in vulgar language so I wrote it down after all.'<sup>281</sup> This statement, in its own small way, resonates

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<sup>277</sup> Dodds, p. 55.

<sup>278</sup> Steedman, p. 143.

<sup>279</sup> The Hueffer work is still in the stock of the Lit & Phil library and quite possibly still in the same spot Dodds might have returned it to in October 1915 and where I found it some hundred years later.

<sup>280</sup> Hueffer, p. 20.

<sup>281</sup> Dodds, p. 56.

with not only Cifor's sense of emotional justice as witness in the archive: to say the unsayable, to bear witness to the unspeakable however problematic it may prove to be, but, also in the exchangeable use of the term vulgar for affect. Hueffer's usage is that of artificial affectation as opposed to a vulgar but honest expressiveness. Dodd's poem is reproduced here as she presented it in her published diaries.<sup>282</sup>

### ***Annie in the Shell Shop***

Father's in the hospital,  
- There's accident's a heap  
- Doctor says he'll save one eye  
- And three at school to keep!  
Food & coal & clothing  
Are dear as they can be,  
But Annie's in the Shell shop  
Where Father used to be.

Seven day's day-shift,  
Six days night,  
Twelve hours darkness  
Twelve hours light

Far away beyond the sea  
Half the world at stake  
Working all the weary day for  
England's sake

Tommy's in the trenches  
Giving someone beans;  
Jack is in the North Sea  
Hunting submarines  
Mother gets rheumatics bad  
She can't stay on her feet,  
But Annie in the Shell shop  
Keeps the children neat.

Working from before the light  
Till after day is done  
Annie in the winter time  
Hardly sees the sun;  
But though amid the roaring wheels  
Not a note is heard  
Annie in the Shell shop  
Sings like any bird

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<sup>282</sup> Dodds, p. 57.

Are you shocked when Annie  
At the picture-hall is seen?  
Pray didn't you enjoy yourself  
When you were seventeen?  
Leave the old to scrape & pinch  
Against an evil day  
Annie from the Shell shop  
Has earned an hour's play

"More & more munitions!"  
So the soldiers plead,  
Armies in their thousands  
Are making good the need.  
Who says we'll be beaten?  
We know it isn't true  
Annie of the Shell shop  
Is going to see us through!

Seven days day shift,  
Six days night;  
Twelve hours darkness,  
Twelve hours light.

Somewhere out across the sea  
Half the world's at stake;  
Working all the sleepy night  
For England's sake

With its alternate ABAB rhyme scheme, Dodds' verse bounces along with a youthful vulgar panache and seems, by our standards, harmless enough, but it is replete with significant detail. It speaks to the perils of industry and the cost of living for a working family. Its insistent rhythm embodies the shunt and clang of the workplace with its relentless manufacture of munitions for a war that is 'half a world away', but where, above the din, Annie 'sings like any bird'. It also directly references the public criticisms of the 'girls' in munitions who had become visible and vocal as their new wage-earning power allowed them visits, in this instance, to the 'picture-hall'. However, Dodds' poem insists that these young women, represented by Annie Peacock, were 'going to see us through'. This is a celebratory narrative rather than an entirely enforced one. It celebrates the 'girls' war effort, but also asserts their right to independence. The assertion of a right to independence by Dodds, along with the poem's music-hall vulgarity, may account for Dodds' dismay at what she perceived as her impudent and



unorthodox creative urgings. The writing and witness also reflect poetically the complications represented by what may be deemed, for the archivist, a 'proper object of study'.<sup>283</sup> Dodds' work throws light onto what once inhabited an archival absence delimited by what is deemed of archival worth.

Although Dodds' 'music-hall' poem offered much insight it delineates a younger woman's experience. My character of Molly – dogged by intimations of diminishing usefulness, a more mature woman – was still absent. This was the character evolving from the fragments of Lady Parsons, Barbara Hall and Lizzie Holmes whom I sought to creatively interpolate into the archive, to give voice to her silence, and absence from historical record and study. Not a young woman with some kind of employment, however precarious and onerous, ahead of her, but, that most ephemeral of beings, a woman faced with the prospect of a return to fractured domesticity and a dwindling life of servitude. A woman pressurised by the exigencies of war and work and its attendant problems of invisibility for older women – a problem which still persists today. Moore describes how older women's working lives are structured and delimited by an 'occupational and sectoral segregation' which underpins 'a legacy of disadvantage.'<sup>284</sup> Molly represents a woman at the end of her perceived usefulness to community and society, offered a glimpse of hope, but then identified as a dilutee, literally seeping away into the pages of history. With reference to these older women at the works, Dodds writes that she had assumed that working women did not smile but found that: 'It isn't true to say that working women never smile, perhaps it is true of older women – married women with big families, & the dinner, & the washing always on their minds. You don't see them smile too often but even they haven't really forgotten how.'<sup>285</sup> This statement is a further expression of an embedded cultural mythology of the iron in the soul, the stoicism of working-class women, but I was also interested in the smiling, in the 'haven't forgotten how.' Dodds re-evaluated this assumption through her direct experience, and although with the generic use of the term 'girls' for women of all ages she wrote that 'all these girls had pleasant open smiles to greet us with'.<sup>286</sup> A smiling

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<sup>283</sup> Milligan, p. 22.

<sup>284</sup> Sian Moore, "No matter what I did I would still end up in the same position": age as a factor defining older women's experience of labour market participation" *BSA Publications Ltd*, 23(4), (2009) 655-671 (p. 656).

<sup>285</sup> Dodds, p. 54.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.

young woman can be seen depicted on the next page by John Lavery in his 1917 painting: *Elswick 1917, Messrs Armstrong, Whitworth & Company*.



**Fig 1:5 John Lavery, *Elswick, 1917: Messrs Armstrong, Whitworth & Company*, Imperial War Museum Collections: Art.IWM ART 2883**

Dodds' understood that the pressures of family and economy do not lend themselves to an easy smile. Despite its potential as propaganda Lavery's idealised painting seems to suggest what Dodds herself encountered. An atmosphere counter to the grim conditions she had expected. Similarly, the photographs from the archival image collection at the

Discovery Museum confound expectations and provide us with a picture of an empowered, but also conflicted workforce.<sup>287</sup> As observed by Dodds, the women sang and joked, working through gruelling conditions and privations and were deserving of a social justice, a recognition of their own particular agency. The 'girls' seemed happy in their work, but was that happiness derived from their contribution to the war effort, or their acquisition of new and sustainable engineering skills, the solidarity of the shop-floor and the potential to elevate themselves beyond the drudgery of domestic servitude at home and the depredations of employment as a domestic servant? For older women these possibilities must have been particularly tantalizing. The local archives' representations of these women have largely expunged these inconsistencies and inherent arguments regarding agency provided by Dodds' record, and the concomitant slender evidence of their dissent provided by the Joicey Collection at the Discovery Museum as mentioned in Chapter One. However, I was to find further compelling evidence at the Lit & Phil of the potential for dissent which enabled a nuanced and disturbing expression of the mature munitions workers experience. Hidden in plain sight along with other the fugitive ephemera there was a further iteration of my character of Molly hidden there.

A little-known play called *The Handmaidens of Death* is shelved at the Lit & Phil in the same upper gallery as the copy of Ford Madox Hueffer's poetry which had influenced Dodds. After an internet search for dramatic material of the time revealed its title, to find a rather battered copy of the play at the Lit & Phil was an example of serendipity working its magic. It was written in 1918 by Maud L. Deuchar under the pseudonym of Herbert Tremaine. Deuchar's text portrays six female munitions workers of varying stations in life. The narrative depicts their struggles for independence as they negotiate the class divide in their new work at a munitions factory somewhere outside of the capital. The women bond over the sharing of what may seem, to our modern sensibilities, frequently off-colour jingoistic jokes. However, they are more overwhelmingly concerned for their shared prospects of a barren spinsterhood, reaching for potential new freedoms, or an inadequate matrimony because of disabled and dying soldiers returning from the war. Together the disparate women hatch a plan to place love-notes in the shells they are constructing which read 'Our love to Fritz'.

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<sup>287</sup> See Chapter One.

Their plan goes symbolically wrong in Act Two when the play shifts from realism to a dream-state in which the women flirt with five ghoulish figures. Lit only by their smouldering cigarettes, these putative fiancées are the dead German soldiers the women's shells have annihilated.

In Act One, the women rail against an older work-mate, a widow who has taken up with a younger returning soldier. They make veiled comments about how it is the older woman's married 'experience' which allows her to capture such an increasingly rare prize:

JANE (*talking to Gertrude*) ... "Can't stick them war-widows," she says, and she's right enough, too .... What I mean: it's bad enough to have them hanging round taking up the jobs as ought to go to them as isn't married .... But they ought to leave the men alone, anyhow. They ought; they've had their share.<sup>288</sup>

This is a tantalising glimpse of a barely explored reality which speaks to the effects and profits of the war, its attendant employment opportunities for women, and their hidden, conflicted inner lives. The narrative represents an alternate discourse, a subtext to Dodds' observations of the public criticism of the 'girls' enjoying themselves rather too much, suggesting that for them the war was a time of opportunity and progression crushed and negated by the termination of the war. The Armistice and the dearth of marriageable men, according to Deuchar's play, would only bring resentment and disharmony. The play's characters tangentially account for Lizzie Holmes' critical account of her 'stupid man' husband and perhaps her subsequent robust defence of self. It also speaks to the affection, the longing for love, inherent in the inscribed kisses on the Chester-le-Street letters at Woodhorn Colliery and Museum. It contextualises Dodds' friendship with Annie Peacock which crosses class boundaries and, importantly, it anticipates Lady Parsons' assertive remarks regarding the rights of women workers and their post-war prospects, in which she states:

But as for women, they are merely told to go back to what they were doing before, regardless of the fact that, like men, they now have a higher standard of life, and that they also wish to have their economic independence, and freedom to

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<sup>288</sup> Deuchar, p. 10.

make their own way without any artificial restrictions.<sup>289</sup> There is no distinct record of Lady Parsons in the library at the Lit & Phil, not even an obscure biography written by a forgotten author. Neither is there, apart from Dodds' diaries, an account of the local women who were told to go back to doing what they did before the war. In this liberal library with its catholic contents and non-partisan character I found no further trace or record of their dissent. As the popular press of the time told them, the female munitions workers familiar to Dodds and Parsons appear to have done as they were told and disappeared into the post-war landscape.

The inclusive conviviality and unmediated discourse embodied at the Lit & Phil reaches, however, from beyond the forgetful archive, through the eclectic contents of its library. With its spirit of self-directed study there are no sign-posts which direct the researchers' activities there. No directives, but also no boundaries. As Cifor claims in writing of a collection housed by the Free Library of Philadelphia, 'the affective experience of users is emphasized in access [...] inviting users to browse and mediate on their own terms.'<sup>290</sup> Unlike a traditional archive in which dust is the enemy and the maintenance of the fragile objects and documents the priority, at the Lit & Phil one is dwelling-in, breathing-in and touching centuries of engagement and discourse. The two centuries of visitors to the library have left behind traces. As Jay Owens, the cultural geographer observed in her Radio Four 'Four Thought' presentation 'A Speck of Dust', the geo-chemical character of dust and its ancient geological and chemical antecedents are still circling the earth. Containing a composite of multitudinous elements; banned chemical fertilizers, precious metals, skin particles, and perhaps residue of the explosive TNT used in the shells constructed by the female munition workers on Tyneside. This orbiting dust is a fertile yet poisonous brew and, as Owens notes: 'deep in our carpets and furniture is an archive, an aggregate of the geo-chemical history of the world that is impossible fully to destroy.'<sup>291</sup> Likewise, at the Lit & Phil, Steedman's dust of history is imprinted on the pages of the books, gleams in the brass of the worn bannisters, and is polished into the patterned wooden floor – an aggregation of the breath and touch of countless emancipated fugitives who have left there something of themselves.

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<sup>289</sup> Parsons, p. 73.

<sup>290</sup> Cifor, p. 15.

<sup>291</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08mbjqp>



## CONCLUSION

*Arkhe* we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. [...] the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.<sup>292</sup>

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

My research and dwelling in the local archives indicates both the value and limitations of Derrida's statement above of his position on the significance of the archive. The structure of the archive does determine content, and effectively produces the historical event; but my work indicates that the archive's architecture and operations do not have to fully determine the archive's relationship to the future. I hope my work also demonstrates how, we, its subjects, can make use of it. Even the gaps and the dumb objects, the laughter, and the dust can provide opportunities to respond imaginatively and creatively to material which the archive has excluded, or which archival institutions ignore.

For me, Steedman's response to her reading of Derrida's archival fever tied together an interpretation of the omissions in specific archives with my understanding of Ginzburg's conjectural paradigm, which in its turn folds into Freud's early theories of psychoanalysis. My understanding of the value of these core theorisations was further enhanced by De Groot, Holmes and Thorliessen's examinations of the so-called 'heritage industry'; Sangster's feminist perspective on the role of oral history in re-focusing female contributions to lived history; and Cifor's considerations of affect in the archive. The meshing of these analyses resonated with my experience in the *house of the commandments*, but some required reconsideration in the light of what I found there. Investigating the meanings implied by the vacated marks left by the silences and absences of working-class women's histories and their employment in the munitions industry on Tyneside during the First World War in the local archive enabled me to

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<sup>292</sup> Derrida and Prenowitz, p. 9.

honour the archive's social responsibility to those it has ignored. And, by acknowledging affect in the archive I was liberated from the cultural historian's responsibility to the document through considering it as a narrative – a version of a truth relayed by an unreliable narrator. There are multiple problems with archives, as attested by the theories and considerations of archival practice I examined. But scholarly work including that of De Groot, Derrida, Knox, and Steedman encouraged me to set these archival conundrums aside and look for meaning in the gaps, absences, silences, and fragments.

I did not find Molly in the Discovery Museum archive, but I did find photographs of women in a similar situation to hers, wearing grubby and unflattering work clothes, who do not appear to be cowed by the presence of the photographer. On closer examination some have cinched in their waists with a belt, some have not bothered. Some are wearing men's ties, some not. Most wear their caps in idiosyncratic fashion, and almost all of them regard us with direct smiles. They appear to occupy the space with confidence; rhetorically they make a collective statement of ownership, an ownership subsequently denied them in employment practices and in the local archive's characterization of their economic role. I found these women because I was in a privileged position, gifted time with the archive and an archivist. These women are not foregrounded in the exhibits on permanent display and when given an outing it was within the context of a pop-up time-limited exhibition which promulgated the received opinion of cheery working-class girls happy to do their duty during the war and then return to invisibility at its conclusion. This, of course, was at odds with Lady Katherine Parsons' testimony which I found in an obscure archival sources booklet. Until now, the question of the given circumstances of the women's apparent acceptance of their redundancy has not been asked of them within the implicit *commandment* of this archive. Here, De Groot's discussion of the issues raised by the 'commodification of heritage' suggests that the silencing of non-sanctioned 'voices' is a product of the spreading thin of limited resources.<sup>293</sup> As he observes, 'Visitors are profiled, institutions seek brand recognition and loyalty, the visit itself becomes increasingly well-wrought and determined.'<sup>294</sup> Within this commodification process no one wants to hear that 'all pleasant hopes were destroyed', and that an efficient and enthusiastic workforce were

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<sup>293</sup> De Groot, p. 237.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 241.



possibly as traumatised by their redundancy as they were silenced and subjugated by the realities of a brutal and mechanised war.<sup>295</sup> The resounding silence created by this 'commodification' surrounds and folds in on this alternative narrative of these women's lives, forcing a creative writer looking for fugitive voices to infer and deduce from the remnants left by the products of the archivization process. The subsequent feminist reinvigoration of archival practice elevates the notion that in order to give meaning to their contribution we are duty bound to sift through Steedman's dust.

This critical and philosophical rendering of the problems within the archive was exactly the metaphorical motor I required; the disappearance of a canteen of spoons and their later re-emergence in some imagined archive of my own making decades later, bringing to this creative endeavour Steedman's assertion that: 'historians read for what is *not there*: the silences and the absences of the documents always speak to us.'<sup>296</sup> With Steedman's observation in mind, I reconsidered the silence of the mark on paper of a kiss and the noise which is inferred as lips contact with flesh. I contemplated the meaning of these gestures during my time at Woodhorn Colliery and Museum. Examining the war-time letters of a local family and their expressions of love and affection I reflected on the persistence of an archive which sidelines even relatively contemporary working women's contributions to the priorities of a masculine cultural mythology.

At Durham County Record Office, I was able to read into the peculiarities, the stops and the starts, the echolalia of an elderly woman's recorded recollections of her place within the local cultural mythology via her experiences during the First World War. This creative process, which treats testimony as a constructed narrative, benefited from Ginzburg's affirmation of an experiential process in which 'knowledge of this sort was richer than any written codification; it was learned not from books but from the living voice, from gestures and glances'.<sup>297</sup> My understanding of the material I found there was aided by Steedman's enforced narration and by Sangster and her colleagues' navigations of the difficulties attendant on the oral history as an historical record and the implications that it is a presentation of self, framed by an hierarchical power

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<sup>295</sup> Parsons, p. 30.

<sup>296</sup> Steedman, p. 150.

<sup>297</sup> Ginzburg, p. 114.

structure in which the subject may self-censor by way of expediency or an absorbed hegemony of *commandment*.

In a relatively un-sequestered and liberal archive such as that of the Literary & Philosophical Society's library, Derrida's *commencement* and *commandment* are catalogued by time of acquisition and alphabet rather than a hierarchical system of priorities. Here we learn not only from the living voice but also from traces of dead utterances. An archive such as this maintains its roots in its original location and building. It is a temporal and metaphorical space where the dust generated by the books on the shelves and the archival records in the basement are literally the accumulations of centuries of breathing, reading and conversation. One is immersed in this miasma and can assimilate an admixture of coal dust, sweat, spit, grease and rarefied musings and conversation coming through as a murmuring in which a revenant presence inhabits the contemporary atmosphere and location. Perhaps some might take this haunting all too literally: a report by Tony Liddell in *Otherworld North East* describes a female 'presence' in residence at the Lit & Phil called 'Ruth', who, a medium claimed, did not appreciate the investigators being there but was sad to see them go.<sup>298</sup> It is a pleasing flight of fancy to imagine this to be my own pursued witness to a fugitive – Ruth Dodds, still inhabiting the galleries and rooms, searching for stimulating reading material. Ghost or not she gifted me, through her journals, insight into the experiences I was searching for. Through her, for the first time, I read directly the voice of a female munitions worker summoning up a world with vivid description in which I could place my character of Molly. Although older, like Ruth Dodds and Annie Peacock, Molly worked in munitions on the Tyne during the First World War. Like Annie she is working-class and, although lacking formal education, through the training programmes instituted by Lady Katherine Parsons she learnt quickly and became highly skilled. Yet Molly was offered a glimpse of enfranchisement only for it to be withdrawn without explanation. What I imagined happening to her next was the culmination of my explorations of the archive with its natural journey's end being situated in the Lit & Phil, in a direct line along the river from the Armstrong Whitworth munitions complex, a place initiated and sustained by the enquiring industrial philosophers of Tyneside.

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<sup>298</sup> Tony Liddell, *Otherworld North East Ghosts and Hauntings Explored*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Tyne Bridge Publishing, 2004) p 61.

In searching for the silenced voices of archival fugitives I found myself delving deep into the aggregations of refuse and sediment remaindered, sometimes by accident, sometimes by design in the strong-rooms and libraries of these archives and collections. Given what I had uncovered, what would be a suitable conclusion for the character of Molly? Of the choices I had provided for myself from the scarce inferred and direct information I had accrued, what outcome would have the necessary sense of grip and compression to give an affective sense of responsibility to a loss of female agency? Showalter tells us in her history of women and madness *The Female Malady* that at the end of the First World War, 'as soldiers returned to take over their former places as social leaders, women returned to *their* former places as the primary psychiatric patients.'<sup>299</sup> Molly's journey had to end with her incarceration in an asylum. She is found wandering the streets of Newcastle with shorn hair, raving revolution. I had no local statistical evidence for this possibility, but it had been raised as a distinct possibility in conversation with the female archivists I encountered in my researches. It was reinforced by Showalter who further attests that: 'many women felt despair at the prospect of returning to shopworn roles and old routines.'<sup>300</sup> I had been promised that Woodhorn Museum would be acquiring the relevant time-period records for admissions to St George's Lunatic Asylum, Northumberland. However, that trail went cold. Sue Wood's interests had moved on and my research period had come to an end. This suggests a further, in this case involuntary, muting of available information, a situation in which an omission is surrounded by an absence, and fugitive in a deepening silence.

However, the framework which remained and the empty space it contained ultimately proved more intriguing and inspiring than a tumult of voices. Through my familiarity with the given circumstances of January 1919 I was poetically empowered to interpolate that which I deemed necessary to the incomplete stories of Molly, Alfred, Willie and Tamara and their involvement in *The Disappearance of Spoons*. I have discovered that, by acknowledging the difficulties of the archive and redressing its affective absences, by using creative interpolation, ignored and forgotten experiences can be reimagined and invented. The archive is not sentient. It is an imperfect remembrance machine operated through us and on us. As Steedman asserts, the archive

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<sup>299</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: women, madness and English culture, 1830-1980*, (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1987), p 194.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p 197.

cannot be everything. It cannot disinter what was formerly lost to it like human memory can: it is 'made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragments that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there.'<sup>301</sup> We cannot ascribe blame to the archive for its absences but we, the subjects of its chaotic efforts, can bear witness and hold its silence to account. Steedman asserts that the archive's 'condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them.'<sup>302</sup> I hope my research has demonstrated, however, that it is possible to refuse to accept its mediated silence as an outcome, even though the quiet order of the archive may seem to discourage outrage and does reflect the operation of power. My refusal to be deflected, and my engagement with archival absences and misrepresentations, led me to activate the creative potential of envisaging alternative stories. My decision not to accept Derrida's pronouncement as the last word on the archive's relationship to the future liberated a creative and affective relationship to the archive. I have found that archival silences, if attended to affectively, can be more useful to the creative writer than the cacophonous noise generated by the archive's gargantuan and endless efforts to order and systemize what can only ever be a bureaucracy of being.

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<sup>301</sup> Steedman, p. 68.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid p. 68.



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